WITH THE FIRST WAR AMBULANCE IN BELGIUM

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ARTHUR GLEASON

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H. O. MALONE CHAPTER

ORDER OF MYSTIC SMILE

LOANED BY C. F. Chapman

YOUNG HILDA AT THE WARS

HILDA

in her motor-ambulance uniform wearing the "Order of Leopold II," conferred on her by King Albert in person.

With The First War Ambulance in Belgium

Young Hilda at the Wars

By ARTHUR H. GLEASON

AUTHOR OF

"Golden Lads," "Our Part in the Great War,"

With Frontispiece

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TO

CHEVALIER HELEN OF PERVYSE

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EXPERIENCE

(*By way of Preface*)

OF these sketches that tell of ruined Belgium, I must say that I saw what I have told of. They are not meditations in a library. Because of the great courtesy of the Prime Minister of Belgium, who is the war minister, and through the daily companionship of his son, our little group of helpers were permitted to go where no one else could go, to pass in under shell fire, to see action, to lift the wounded out of the muddy siding where they had fallen. Ten weeks of Red Cross work showed me those faces and torn bodies which I have described. The only details that have been altered for the purpose of story-telling are these: The Doctor who rescued the thirty aged at Dixmude is still alive; Smith did not receive the decoration, but

Hilda did; it was a candlestick on the piano of Pervyse that vibrated to shell fire; the spy continues to signal without being caught; "Pervyse," the war-baby, was not adopted by an American financier; motor ambulances were given to the Corps, not to an individual. With these exceptions, the incidents are lifted over from the experience of two English women and my wife in Pervyse, and my own weeks as stretcher-bearer on an ambulance.

In that deadlock of slaughter where I worked, I saw no pageantry of war, no glitter and pomp, at all. Nothing remains to me of war pictures except the bleakness. When I think suddenly of Belgium, I see a town heavy with the coming horror: — almost all the houses sealed, the curtains drawn, the friendly door barred. And then I see a town after the invaders have shelled it and burned it, with the homeless dogs howling in the streets, and the pigeons circling in search of their cote, but not finding it. Or I

look down a long, lonely road, gutted with shell holes, with dead cattle in the fields, and farm-houses in a heap of broken bricks and dust.

And when I do not see a landscape, dreary with its creeping ruin, I see men in pain. Sometimes I see the faces of dead boys — one boy outstretched at length on a doorstep with the smoke of his burning body rising through the mesh of his blue army clothing; and then a half mile beyond, in the yard of a farm-house, a young peasant spread out as he had fallen when the chance bullet found him.

That alone which seemed good in the horror was the courage of the modern man. He dies as simply and as bravely as the young of Thermopylæ. These men of the factory and office are crowding more meaning into their brief weeks by the Yser and under the shattering of Ypres than is contained in all the last half century of clerk routine.

I

YOUNG HILDA AT THE WARS

SHE was an American girl from that very energetic and prosperous state of Iowa, which if not as yet the mother of presidents, is at least the parent of many exuberant and useful persons. Will power is grown out yonder as one of the crops. She had a will of her own and her eye showed a blue cerulean. Her hair was a bright yellow, lighting up a gloomy room. It had three shades in it, and you never knew ahead of time which shade was going to enrich the day, so that an encounter with her always carried a surprise. For when she arranged that abundance in soft nun-like drooping folds along the side of the head, the quieter tones were in command. And when it was piled

coil on coil on the crown, it added inches to the prairie stature, and it was mellow like ripe corn in the sun. But the prettiest of all was at the seashore or on the hills, when she unbuckled it from its moorings and let it fall in its plenty to the waist. Then its changing lights came out in a rippling play of color, and the winds had their way with it. It was then youth's battleflag unfurled, and strong men were ready to follow. It was such a vivid possession that strangers were always suspicious of it, till they knew the girl, or saw it in its unshackled freedom. She had that wayward quality of charm, which visits at random a frail creature like Maude Adams, and a burly personality, such as that of Mr. Roosevelt. It is a pleasant endowment, for it leaves nothing for the possessor to do in life except to bring it along, in order to obtain what he is asking for. When it is harnessed to will power, the pair of them enjoy a career.

So when Hilda arrived in large London in September of the great war, there was nothing for it but that somehow she must go to war. She did not wish to shoot anybody, neither a German grocer nor a Flemish peasant, for she liked people. She had always found them willing to make a place for her in whatever was going her way. But she did want to see what war was like. Her experience had always been of the gentler order. Canoeing and country walks, and a flexible wrist in playing had given her only a meagre training for the stresses of the modern battlefield. Once she had fainted when a favorite aunt had fallen from a trolley car. And she had left the room when a valued friend had attacked a stiff loaf of bread with a crust that turned the edge of the knife into his hand. She had not then made her peace with bloodshed and suffering.

On the Strand, London, there was a group of alert professional women, housed

in a theatre building, and known as the Women's Crisis League. To their office she took her way, determined to enlist for Belgium. Mrs. Bracher was in charge of the office — a woman with a stern chin, and an explosive energy, that welcomed initiative in newcomers.

"It's a poor time to get pupils," said the fair-haired Hilda, "I don't want to go back to the Studio Club in New York, as long as there's more doing over here. I'm out of funds, but I want to work."

"Are you a trained nurse?" asked Mrs. Bracher, who was that, as well as a motor cyclist and a woman of property, a certificated midwife, and a veterinarian.

"Not even a little bit," replied Hilda, "but I'm ready to do dirty work. There must be lots to do for an untrained person, who is strong and used to roughing it. I'll catch hold all right, if you'll give me the chance."

"Right, oh," answered Mrs. Bracher. "Dr. Neil McDonnell is shortly leaving for Belgium with a motor-ambulance Corps," she said, "but he has hundreds of applications, and his list is probably completed."

"Thank you," said Hilda, "that will do nicely."

"I don't mind telling you," continued Mrs. Bracher, "that I shall probably go with him to the front. I hope he will accept you, but there are many ahead of you in applying, and he has already promised more than he can take."

Hilda took a taxi from St. Mary Le Strand to Harley Street. Dr. Neil McDonnell was a dapper mystical little specialist, who was renowned for his applications of psychotherapy to raging militants and weary society leaders. He was a Scottish Highlander, with a rare gift of intuitive insight. He, too, had the agreeable quality of personal charm.

Like all to whom the gods have been good, he looked with a favoring eye on the spectacle of youth.

"You come from a country which will one day produce the choicest race in history," he began, "you have a blend of nationalities. We have a little corner in Scotland where several strains were merged, and the men were finer and the women fairer than the average. But as for going to Belgium, I must tell you that we have many more desiring to go than we can possibly find room for."

"That is why I came to you," responded Hilda. "That means competition, and then you will have to choose the youngest and strongest."

"I can promise you nothing," went on the Doctor; "I am afraid it is quite impossible. But if you care to do it, keep in touch with me for the next fortnight. Send me an occasional letter. Call me up, if you will."

She did. She sent him telegrams,

letters by the "Boots" in her lodging-house. She called upon him. She took Mrs. Bracher with her.

And that was how Hilda came to go to Flanders. When the Corps crossed from happy unawakened London to forlorn Belgium, they felt lost. How to take hold, they did not know. There were the cars, and here were the workers, but just what do you do?

Their first weeks were at Ghent, rather wild, disheveled weeks of clutching at work. They had one objective: the battlefield; one purpose: to make a series of rescues under fire. Cramped in a placid land, smothered by peace-loving folk, they had been set quivering by the war. The time had come to throw themselves at the Continent, and do or die where action was thick. Nothing was quainter, even in a land of astounding spectacles, than the sight of the rescuing ambulances rolling out to the wounded of a morning, loaded to the gunwale with charm-

ing women and several men. "Where will they put the wounded?" was the query that sprang to every lip that gaped at their passing. There was room for everybody but wounded. Fortunately there were few wounded in those early days when rescuers tingled for the chance to serve and see. So the Ghent experience was a probation rather than a fulfilled success. Then the enemy descended from fallen Antwerp, and the Corps sped away, ahead of the vast gray Prussian machine, through Bruges and Ostend, to Furnes. Here, too, in Furnes, the Corps was still trying to find its place in the immense and intricate scheme of war.

The man that saved them from their fogged incertitude was a Belgian doctor, a military Red Cross worker. The first flash of him was of a small silent man, not significant. But when you had been with him, you felt reserves of force. That small person had a will of his own. He was thirty-one years of age, with a thoughtful but kindly face. His eye

had pleasant lights in it, and a twinkle of humor. His voice was low and even-toned. He lifted the wounded in from the trenches, dressed their wounds, and sent them back to the base hospitals. He was regimental dentist as well as Doctor, and accompanied his men from point to point, along the battlefront from the sea to the frontier. Van der Helde was his name. He called on the Corps soon after their arrival in Furnes, one of the last bits of Belgian soil unoccupied by the invaders.

"You are wandering about like lost souls," he said to them; "let me tell you how to get to work."

He did so. As the results of his suggestions, the six motor ambulances and four touring cars ran out each morning to the long thin line of troops that lay burrowed in the wet earth, all the way from the Baths of Nieuport-on-the-Sea down through the shelled villages of the Ramskappele-Dixmude frontier

to the beautiful ancient city of Ypres. The cars returned with their patient freight of wounded through the afternoon and evening.

What had begun as an adventure deepened to a grim fight against blood-poisoning and long-continuing exposure and hunger. Hilda learned to drop the antiseptic into open wounds, to apply the pad, and roll the cotton. She learned to cut away the heavy army blue cloth to reach the spurting artery. She built the fire that heated the soup. She distributed the clean warm socks. Doubtless someone else could have done the work more skilfully, but the someone else was across the water in a comfortable country house, or watching the Russian dancers at the Coliseum.

The leader of the Corps, Dr. McDonnell, was an absurdly brave little man. His heart may not have been in the Highlands, but his mind certainly was, for he led his staff into shell fire, week-

days and Sundays, and all with a fine unconsciousness that anything unusual was singing and breaking around the path of their performance. He carried a pocket edition of the Oxford Book of Verse, and in the lulls of slaughter turned to the Wordsworth sonnets with a fine relish.

"Something is going to happen. I can feel it coming," said Mrs. Bracher after one of these excursions into the troubled regions.

"Yes," agreed Hilda, "they are long chances we are taking, but we are fools for luck."

A famous war correspondent paid them a fleeting visit, before he was ordered twenty miles back to Dunkirk by Kitchener.

"By the law of probabilities," he observed to Dr. McDonnell, as he was saying good-bye, "you and your staff are going to be wiped out, if you keep on running your motors into excitement."

The Doctor smiled. It was doubtful if he heard the man.

One day, the Doctor got hold of Smith, a London boy driver, and Hilda, and said:

"I think we would better visit Dixmude, this morning. It sounds like guns in that direction. That means work for us. Get your hat, my dear."

"But I never wear a hat," she said with a touch of irritation.

"Ah, I hadn't noticed," returned the Doctor, and he hadn't. Hilda went free and fair those days, with uncovered head. Where the men went, there went she. For the modern woman has put aside fear along with the other impediments. The Doctor and Hilda, and, lastly, Smith, climbed aboard and started at fair speed.

Smith's motor-ambulance was a swift machine, canopied by a brown hood, the color of a Mediterranean sail, with red crosses on the sides to ward off shells,

and a huge red cross on the top to claim immunity from aeroplanes with bombs and plumbed arrows.

"Make haste, make haste," urged Dr. McDonnell, who felt all time was wasted that was not spent where the air was thick. They had ridden for a half hour.

"There are limits, sir," replied Smith. "If you will look at that piece of road ahead, sir, you will see that it's been chewed up with Jack Johnsons. It's hard on the machine."

But the Doctor's attention was already far away, for he had been seized with the beauty of the fresh spring morning. There was a tang in the air, and sense of awakening life in the ground, which not all the bleakness of the wasted farms and the dead bodies of cattle could obscure for him.

"Isn't that pretty," he observed, as a shrapnel exploded overhead in the blue with that ping with which it breaks its casing and releases the pattering bullets.

It unfolded itself in a little white cloud, which hung motionless for an instant before the winds of the morning shredded it.

To Hilda the sensation of being under fire was always exhilarating. The thought of personal peril never entered her head. The verse of a favorite gypsy song often came into her memory these days:—

"I am breath, dew, all resources.
Laughing in your face, I cry
Would ye kill me, save your forces.
Why kill me, who cannot die."

They swept on to Oudekappele and its stout stone church, where lonely in the tower, the watcher, leaning earthward, told off his observations of the enemy to a soldier in the rafters, who passed them to another on the ladder, who dropped them to another on the stone floor, who hurried them to an officer at the telephone in the west front, who spoke them to a battery one mile away.

They took the poplar-lined drive-way that leads to the crossroads. They turned east, and made for Caeskerke. And now Smith let out his engine, for it is not wise to delay along a road that is in clear sight and range of active guns. At Caeskerke station, they halted for reports on the situation in Dixmude.

There, they saw their good friend, Dr. van der Helde, in the little group behind the wooden building of the station.

"I have just come from Dixmude," he said; "it is under a fairly heavy fire. The Hospital of St. Jean is up by the trenches. I have thirty poor old people there, who were left in the town when the bombardment started. They have been under shell fire for four days, and their nerves are gone. They are paralyzed with fright, and cannot walk. I brought them to the hospital from the cellars where they were hiding. I have

come back here to try to get cars to take them to Furnes. Will you help me get them?"

"That's what we're here for," said Dr. McDonnell.

"Thank you," said the Belgian quietly. "Shall we not leave the lady?" he suggested, turning to Hilda.

"Try it," she replied with a smile.

Dr. van der Helde jumped aboard.

"And you mean to tell me you couldn't get hold of an army car to help you out, all this time?" asked Dr. McDonnell, in amazement.

"Orders were strict," replied the Belgian; "the military considered it too dangerous to risk an ambulance."

They had entered the town of Dixmude. Hilda had never seen so thorough a piece of ruin. Walls of houses had crumbled out upon the street into heaps of brick and red dust. Stumps of building still stood, blackened down their surface, as if lightning had visited them.

Wire that had once been telegraph and telephone crawled over the piles of wreckage, like a thin blue snake. The car grazed a large pig, that had lost its pen and trough and was scampering wildly at each fresh detonation from the never-ceasing guns.

"It's a bit warm," said Smith, as a piece of twisted metal, the size of a man's fist, dropped by the front wheel.

"That is nothing," returned Dr. van der Helde.

They had to slow up three times for heaps of ruin that had spread across the road. They reached the Hospital. It still stood unbroken. It had been a convent, till Dr. van der Helde commandeered it to the reception of his cases. He led them to the hall. There down the long corridor were seated the aged poor of Dixmude. Not one of the patient creatures was younger than seventy. Some looked to be over eighty. White-haired men and women, bent over,

shaking from head to foot, muttering. Most of them looked down at the floor. It seemed as if they would continue there rooted, like some ancient lichen growth in a forest. A few of them looked up at the visitors, with eyes in which there was little light. No glimmer of recognition altered the expression of dim horror.

"Come," said Dr. van der Helde, firmly but kindly, "come, old man. We are going to take you to a quiet place."

The one whom he touched and addressed shook his head and settled to the same apathy which held the group.

"Oh, yes," said Dr. van der Helde, "you'll be all right."

He and Smith and Dr. McDonnell caught hold of the inert body and lifted it to the car. Two old women and one more aged man they carried from that hall-way of despair to the motor

which had been left throbbing under power.

"Will you come back?" asked Dr. van der Helde.

"As soon as we have found a place for them," replied Dr. McDonnell.

The car pulled out of the hospital yard and ran uninjured through the town. The firing was intermittent, now. Two miles back at the cross-roads, four army ambulances were drawn up waiting for orders.

"Come on in. The water's fine," cried Hilda to the drivers.

"*Comment?*" asked one of them.

"Why don't you go into Dixmude?" she explained. "There are twenty-six old people in St. Jean there. We've got four of them here."

The drivers received an order of release from their commanding officer, and streamed into the doomed town and on to the yard of the hospital. In two hours they had emptied it of its misery.

At Oudekappele Hilda found a room in the little inn, and made the old people comfortable. At noon, Dr. van der Helde joined her there, and they had luncheon together out of the ample stores under the seat of the ambulance. Up to this day, Doctor van der Helde had always been reserved. But the brisk affair had unlocked something in his hushed preserves.

"It is a sight for tired eyes," said the gallant doctor, "to see such hair in these parts. You bring me a pleasure."

"I am glad you like it," returned Hilda.

"Oh, it is better than that," retorted the Doctor, "I love it. It brings good luck, you know. Beautiful hair brings good luck."

"I never heard that," said Hilda.

That night, for the first time since the hidden guns had marked Dixmude for their own, the Doctor slept in security ten kilometers back of the trenches.

That night a shell struck the empty hospital of St. Jean and wrecked it.

"Well, have you worked out a plan to cure this idleness," said Mrs. Bracher, thundering into the room, like a charge of cavalry. "I've done nothing but cut buttons off army coats, all day."

"Such a day," said Hilda, "yes, we've got a plan. We met Dr. van der Helde again to-day. He is a brave man, and he is very pleasant, too. He has been working in Dixmude, but no one is there any more, and he wants to start a new post. He wants to go to Pervyse, and he wishes you and Scotch and me to go with him and run a dressing-station for the soldiers."

"Pervyse!" cried Mrs. Bracher. "Why, my dear girl, Pervyse is nothing but a rubbish heap. They've shot it to pieces. There's no one at Pervyse."

"The soldiers are there," replied Hilda; "they come in from the trenches with a

finger off or a flesh wound. They are full of colds from all the wet weather we had last month. They haven't half enough to eat. They need warm soup and coffee after a night out on duty. Oh, there's lots to do. Will you do it?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bracher. "How about you, Scotch?"

Scotch was a charming maiden of the same land as Dr. McDonnell. She was the silent member of a noisy group, but there was none of the active work that she missed.

"Wake up, Scotch," said Hilda, "and tell us. Will you go to Pervyse and stay? Mrs. Bracher and I are going."

"Me, too," said Scotch.

The next day, Dr. van der Helde called for them, and they motored the seven miles to Pervyse. What Dixmude was on a large scale, that was Pervyse in small. A once lovely village had been made into a black waste. On the main streets, not one house had been

left unwrecked. They found a roomy cellar, under a house that had two walls standing. Here they installed themselves with sleeping bags, a soup kitchen, and a kit of first-aid-to-the-injured apparatus.

Then began for Hilda the most spirited days of her life. They had callers from all the world at seasons when there was quiet in the district. Maxine Elliot, Prince Alexander of Teck, Generals, the Queen of the Belgians, labor leaders — so ran the visiting list. The sorrow that was Belgium had become famous, and this cellar of loyal women in Pervyse was one of the few spots left on Belgium soil where work was being done for the little hunted field army.

The days were filled with care of the hurt, and food for the hungry, and clothing for the dilapidated. And the nights — she knew she would not forget those nights, when the three of them took turns in nursing the wounded men resting on

stretchers. The straw would crackle as the sleepers turned. The faint yellow light from the lantern threw shadows on the unconscious faces. And she was glad of the smile of the men in pain, as they received a little comfort. She had never known there was such goodness in human nature. Who was she ever to be impatient again, when these men in extremity could remember to thank her. Here in this worst of the evils, this horror of war, men were manifesting a humanity, a consideration, at a higher level than she felt she had ever shown it in happy surroundings in a peaceful land. Hilda won the sense, which was to be of abiding good to her, that at last she had justified her existence. She, too, was now helping to continue that great tradition of human kindness which had made this world a more decent place to live in. No one could any longer say she was only a poor artist in an age of big things. Had not the

poor artist, in her own way, served the general welfare, quite as effectively, as if she had projected a new breakfast food, or made a successful marriage. Her fingers, which had not gathered much gold, had at least been found fit to lessen some human misery. In that strength she grew confident.

As the fair spring days came back and green began to put out from the fields, the soldiers returned to their duty.

Now the killing became brisk again. The cellar ran full with its tally of scotched and crippled men. Dr. van der Helde was in command of the work. He was here and there and everywhere — in the trenches at daybreak, and gathering the harvest of wounded in the fields after nightfall. Sometimes he would be away for three days on end. He would run up and down the lines for seven miles, watching the work. The Belgian nation was a race of individualists, each man merrily minding his own business

in his own way. The Belgian army was a volunteer informal group of separate individuals. The Doctor was an individualist. So the days went by at a tense swift stride, stranger than anything in the story-books.

One morning the Doctor entered the cellar, with a troubled look on his face.

"I am forced to ask you to do something," began he, "and yet I hardly have the heart to tell you."

"What can the man be after," queried Hilda, "will you be wanting to borrow my hair brush to curry the cavalry with?"

"Worse than that," responded he; "I must ask you to cut off your beautiful hair."

"My hair," gasped Hilda, darting her hand to her head, and giving the locks an unconscious pat.

"Your hair," replied the Doctor. "It breaks my heart to make you do it,

but there's so much disease floating around in the air these days, that it is too great a risk for you to live with sick men day and night and carry all that to gather germs."

"I see," said Hilda in a subdued tone.

"One thing I will ask, that you give me a lock of it," he added quietly. She thought he was jesting with his request.

That afternoon she went to her cellar, and took the faithful shears which had severed so many bandages, and put them pitilessly at work on her crown of beauty. The hair fell to the ground in rich strands, darker by a little, and softer far, than the straw on which it rested. Then she gathered it up into one of the aged illustrated papers that had drifted out to the post from kind friends in Furnes. She wrapped it tightly inside the double page picture of laughing soldiers, celebrating Christmas in the trenches. And she carried

it outside behind the black stump of a house which they called their home, and threw it on the cans that had once contained bully-beef. She was a little heart-sick at her loss, but she had no vanity. As she was stepping inside, the Doctor came down the road.

He stopped at sight of her.

"Oh, I am sorry," he said.

"I don't care," she answered, and braved it off by a little flaunt of her head, though there was a film over her eyes.

"And did you keep a lock for me?" he asked.

"You are joking," she replied.

"I was never more serious," he returned. She shook her head, and went down into the cellar. The Doctor walked around to the rear of the house.

A few minutes later, he entered the cellar.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand, "I'm going up the line to Nieu-

port. I'll be back in the morning." He turned to climb the steps, and then paused a moment.

"Beautiful hair brings good luck," he said.

"Then my luck's gone," returned Hilda.

"But mine hasn't," he answered.

"Let us go up the road this morning," suggested Mrs. Bracher, next day, "and see how the new men are getting on."

There was a line of trenches to the north, where reinforcements had just come in, all their old friends having been ordered back to Furnes for a rest.

"How loud the shells are, this morning," said Hilda. There were whole days when she did not notice them, so accustomed the senses grow to a repetition.

"Yes, they're giving us special treatment just now," replied Mrs. Bracher; "it's that six-inch gun over behind the farm-house, trying out these new

men. They're gradually getting ready to come across. It will only be a few days now."

They walked up the road a hundred yards, and came on a knot of soldiers stooping low behind the roadside bank.

"What are those men looking at?" exclaimed Mrs. Bracher sharply.

"Some poor fellow. Probably work for us," returned Hilda.

Mrs. Bracher went nearer, peered at the outstretched form on the grass bank, then turned her head away suddenly.

"No work for us," she said. "Don't go near, child. It's too horrible. His face is gone. A shell must have taken it away. Oh, I'm sick of this war. I am sick of these sights."

One of the little group of men about the body had drawn near to her.

"What do you want?" she asked crossly, as a woman will who is interrupted when she is close to tears.

"Will I identify him?" she repeated after him. "I tell you I never saw the man."

A little gasp of amazement came from the soldiers about the body.

"See what we have found," called one of the men — "in his pocket."

It was a lock of the very lightest and gayest of hair.

"Ah, my doctor," Hilda cried.

She spread the lock across the breast of the dead man. It was so vivid in the morning sun as to seem almost a living thing.

"And he said it would bring him luck," she murmured.

GOOD WILL

I looked into the face of my brother. There was no face there, only a red interior. This thing had been done to my brother, the Belgian, by my brother, the German. He had sent a splinter of shell through five miles of sunlight, hoping it would do some such thing as this.

II

THE RIBBONS THAT STUCK IN HIS COAT

THE little group was gathered in the cellar of Pervyse. An occasional shell was heard in the middle distancé, as artillery beyond the Yser threw a lazy feeler over to the railway station. The three women were entertaining a distinguished guest at the evening meal of tinned rabbit and dates. Their visitor was none other than F. Ainslie-Barkleigh, the famous English war-correspondent. He was dressed for the part. He wore high top-boots, whose red leather shone richly even in the dim yellow of the lantern that lit them to their feast. About his neck was swung a heavy black strap from which hung a pair of very elegant field-glasses, ready for service at a moment's call. He could

sweep a battle-field with them, or expose a hidden battery, or rake a road. From the belt that made his jacket shapely about his person, there depended a map of the district, with heavy inked red lines for the position of friend or foe. He was a tall man, with an immense head, on which were stuck, like afterthoughts, very tiny features — a nose easily overlooked, a thin slit of a mouth, and small inset eyes. All the upper part of him was overhanging and alarming, till you chanced on those diminutive features. It was as if his growth had been terminated before it reached the expressive parts. He had an elaborate manner — a reticence, a drawl, and a chronic irony. Across half of his chest there streaked a rainbow of color; gay little ribbons of decoration, orange and crimson and purple and white.

Mrs. Bracher, sturdy, iron-jawed, and Scotch, her pretty young assistant, sat opposite him at table. Hilda did the

honors by sitting next him, and passing him tins of provender, as required.

"What pretty ribbons you wear," said Hilda. "Where did you get them?"

"Oh, different wars," returned Barkleigh carelessly.

"That's modest, but it's vague," urged Hilda. "If I had such pretty ribbons, I should have the case letter and the exhibit number printed on each. Now this one, for instance. What happened to set this fluttering?"

"Oh, that one," he said, nearly twisting his eyes out of their sockets to see which one her fingers had lighted on. "That's one the Japs gave me."

"Thank you for not calling them the little brown people," returned Hilda; "that alone would merit decoration at their hands. And this gay thing, what principality gave you this?"

"That came from somewhere in the Balkans. I always did get those states muddled up."

"Incredible haziness," responded Hilda. "You probably know the exact hour when the King and his Chief of Staff called you out on the Town-hall steps. You must either be a very brave man or else write very nice articles about the ruling powers."

"The latter, of course," returned he, a little nettled.

"Vain as a peacock," whispered Scotch to the ever-watchful Mrs. Bracher.

"I don't understand you women," said Ainslie-Barkleigh, clearing his throat for action. But Hilda was too quick for him.

"I know you don't," she cut in, "and that is no fault in you. But what you really mean is that you don't like us, and that, I submit, is your own fault."

"But let me explain," urged he.

"Go ahead," said Hilda.

"Well, what I mean is this," he explained. "Here I find you three women out at the very edge of the battle-front.

Here you are in a cellar, sleeping in bags on the straw, living on bully-beef and canned stuff. Now, you could just as well be twenty miles back, nursing in a hospital."

"Is there any shortage of nurses for the hospitals?" interposed Hilda. "When I went to the Red Cross at Pall Mall in London, they had over three thousand nurses on the waiting list."

"That's true enough," assented Barkleigh. "But what I mean is, this is reckless; you are in danger, without really knowing it."

"So are the men in danger," returned Hilda. "The soldiers come in here, hungry, and we have hot soup for them. They come from the trenches, with a gunshot wound in the hand, or a piece of shell in a leg, and we fix them up. That's better than travelling seven or eight miles before getting attention. Why it was only a week ago that Mrs. Bracher here — "

"Now none of that," broke in the nurse sternly.

"Hush," said Hilda, "it isn't polite to interrupt when a gentleman is asking for information."

She turned back to the correspondent.

"Last week," she took up her story, "a young Belgian private came in here with his lower lip swollen out to twice its proper size. It had got gangrene in it. A silly old military doctor had clapped a treatment over it, when the wound was fresh and dirty, without first cleaning it out. Mrs. Bracher treated it every two hours for six days. The boy used to come right in here from the trenches. And would you believe it, that lip is looking almost right. If it hadn't been for her, he would have been disfigured for life."

"Very good," admitted the correspondent, "but it doesn't quite satisfy me. Wait till you get some real hot shell

fire out here, then you'll make for your happy home."

"Why," began Scotch, rising slowly but powerfully to utterance.

"It's all right, Scotch," interposed Hilda, at a gallop, "save the surprise. It will keep."

Scotch subsided into a rich silence. She somehow never quite got into the conversation, though she was always in the action. She was one of those silent, comfortable persons, without whom no group is complete. Into her ample placidity fell the high-pitched clamor of noisier people, like pebbles into a mountain lake.

"Now, what do you women think you are doing?" persisted the correspondent. "Why are you here?"

"You really want to know?" queried Hilda.

"I really want to know," he repeated.

"I'll answer you to-morrow," said Hilda. "Come out here to-morrow after-

noon and we'll go to Nieuport. We promised to go over and visit the dressing-station there, and on the way I'll tell you why we are here."

Next day was grey and chilly. A low rumble came out of the north. The women had a busy morning, for the night had been full of snipers perched on trees. The faithful three spread aseptics and bandaged and sewed, and generally cheered the stream of callers from the Ninth and Twelfth Regiments, Army of the King of the Belgians. In the early afternoon, the buzz of motors penetrated to the stuffy cellar, and it needed no yelping horn, squeezed by the firm hand of Smith, to bring Hilda to the surface, alert for the expedition. Two motor ambulances were puffing their lungs out, in the roadway. Pale-faced Smith sat in one at the steering-gear — Smith, the slight London boy who would drive a car anywhere. Beside him sat

F. Ainslie-Barkleigh, bent over upon his war map, studying the afternoon's campaign. In the second ambulance were Tom, the Cockney driver, and the leader of the Ambulance Corps, Dr. Neil McDonnell.

"Jump in," called he, "we're off for Nieuport."

She jumped into the first ambulance, and they turned to the north and took the straight road that leads all the way from Dixmude to the sea. Barkleigh was much too busy with his glasses and his map to give her any of his attention for the first quarter hour. They speeded by sentinel after sentinel, who smiled and murmured, "Les Anglais." Corporals, captains, commandants, gazed in amazement and awe at the massive figure of the war-correspondent, as he challenged the horizon with his binoculars and then dipped to his map for consultation. Only once did the party have to yield up the pass-word,

which for that afternoon was "Charleroi." Finally Barkleigh turned to the girl.

"We had a discussion last evening," he began, "and you promised to answer my question. Why are you out here? Why isn't a hospital good enough for you, back in Furnes or Dunkirk?"

"I remember," returned Hilda. "I'll tell you. I could answer you by saying that we're out to help, and that would be true, too. But it wouldn't be quite the whole truth, for there's a tang of adventure in Pervyse, where we can see the outposts of the other fellows, that there isn't in the Carnegie Library in Pittsburg, let us say. Yes, we're out to help. But we're out for another reason, too. For generations now, you men have had a monopoly of physical courage. You have faced storms at sea, and charged up hills, and pulled out drowning children, and footed it up fire-ladders, till you think that bravery is a male characteristic. You've always handed

out the passive suffering act to us. We had any amount of compliments as long as we stuck to silent suffering. But now we want to see what shells look like. As long as sons and brothers have to stand up to them, why, we're going to be there, too."

"But you haven't been in the thick of it," objected Barkleigh. When the danger is so close you can see it, a woman's nerve isn't as good as a man's. It can't be. She isn't built that way."

"That's the very point," retorted Hilda, "we're going to show you."

"Damn quick," muttered Smith.

In the pleasant heat of their discussion, they hadn't been noticing the roadway. It was full of soldiers, trudging south. The rumble had become a series of reports. The look of the peaceful day was changing. Barkleigh turned from his concentration on the girl, and glanced up the road.

"These troops are all turning," he said.

"You are right," Hilda admitted.

"Can't you see," he urged, "they're all marching back. That means they've given the place up."

"Oh, hardly that," corrected Hilda; "it simply means that Nieuport is hot for the present moment."

"You're not going in?" continued Barkleigh. "It is foolish to go into the town, when the troops are coming out of it."

"True enough," assented Hilda, "but it's a curious fact that the wounded can't retreat as fast as the other men, so I'm afraid we shall have to look them up. Of course, it would be a lot pleasanter if they could come to meet us half-way."

Smith let out his motor, and turned up his coat collar, a habit of his when he anticipated a breezy time. They pounded down the road, and into the choice old town.

They had chanced on the afternoon when the enemy's guns were reducing it

from an inhabited place into a rubbish heap. They could not well have chosen a brisker hour for the promised visit. The shells were coming in three and four to the minute. There was a sound of falling masonry. The blur of red brick-dust in the air, and the fires from a half dozen blazing houses, filled the eyes with hot prickles. The street was a mess over which the motor veered and tossed like a careening boat in a heavy seawash. In the other car, their leader, brave, perky little Dr. McDonnell, sat with his blue eyes dreaming away at the ruin in front of him. The man was a mystic and burrowed down into his sub-consciousness when under fire. This made him calm, slow, and very absent-minded, during the moments when he passed in under the guns.

They steamed up to the big yellow Hôtel de Ville. This was the target of the concentrated artillery fire, for here troops had been sheltering. Here, too,

in the cellar, was the dressing-station for the wounded. A small, spent, but accurately directed obus, came in a parabola from over behind the roofs, and floated by the ambulance and thudded against the yellow brick of the stately hall.

"Ah, it's got whiskers on it," shouted Hilda in glee. "I didn't know they got tired like that, and came so slow you could see them, did you, Mr. Barkleigh?"

"No, no, of course not," he muttered, "they don't. What's that?"

The clear, cold tinkle of breaking and spilling glass had seized his attention. The sound came out from the Hôtel de Ville.

"The window had a pane," said Hilda.

"The town is doomed," said Barkleigh.

"Can't we get out of this?" he insisted. "This is no place to be."

"No place for a woman, is it?" laughed Hilda.

"Don't let me keep you," she added politely, "if you feel you must go."

"Listen," said the war-correspondent. About a stone's throw to their left, a wall was crumpling up.

Dr. McDonnell had slowly crawled down from his perch on the ambulance. His legs were stiff from the long ride, so he carefully shook them one after the other, and spoke pleasantly to a dog that was wandering about the Grand Place in a forlorn panic. Then he remembered why he had come to the place. There were wounded downstairs in the Town-hall.

"Come on, boys," he said to Tom and Smith, "bring one stretcher, and we'll clear the place out. Hilda, you stay by the cars. We shan't be but a minute."

They disappeared inside the battered building. Barkleigh walked up and down the Grand Place, felt of the machinery of each of the two ambulances, lit a cigarette, threw it away and chewed at an unlighted cigar.

"It's hot," he said; "this is hot."

"And yet you are shaking as if you were chilly," observed Hilda.

"We should never have come," went on Barkleigh. "I said so, away back there on the road. You remember I said so."

"Yes, the first experience under fire is trying," assented Hilda. "I think the shells are the most annoying, don't you, Mr. Barkleigh? Now shrapnel seems more friendly — quite like a hail-storm in Iowa. I come from Iowa, you know. I don't believe you do know that I come from Iowa."

"They're slow," said Barkleigh, looking toward the Town-hall. "Why can't they hurry them out?"

"You see," explained Hilda, "there are only three of them actively at work, and it's quite a handful for them."

In a few moments Smith and Tom appeared, carrying a man with a bandaged leg on their stretcher. Dr. McDonnell was leading two others, who were able to walk with a little direction. One

more trip in and out and the ambulances were loaded.

"Back to Pervyse," ordered Dr. McDonnell.

At Pervyse, Scotch and Mrs. Bracher were ready for them. So was an English Tommy, who singled out Ainslie-Barkleigh.

"Orders from Kitchener, sir," said the orderly. "You must return to Dunkirk at once. No correspondent is allowed at the front."

Barkleigh listened attentively, and assented with a nod of his head. He walked up to the three ladies.

"Very sorry," explained he. "I had hoped to stay with you, and go out again. Very interesting and all that. But K. is strict, you know, so I must leave you."

He bowed himself away.

"Oh, welcome intervention," breathed Mrs. Bracher.

A few weeks had passed with their angry weather, and now all was green

again and sunny. Seldom had the central square of Poperinghe looked gayer than on this afternoon, when soldiers were lined up in the middle, and on all the sides the people were standing by the tens and hundreds. High overhead from every window and on every pole, flags were streaming in the spring wind. Why shouldn't the populace rejoice, for had not this town of theirs held out through all the cruel winter: refuge and rest for their weary troops, and citadel of their King? And was not that their King, standing over yonder on the pavement, higher than the generals and statesmen on the steps of the Town-hall back of him? Tall and slender, crowned with youth and beauty, did he not hold in his hand the hearts of all his people? And to-day he was passing on merit to two English dames, and the people were glad of this, for the two English dames had been kind to their soldiers in sickness, and had undergone no little peril

to carry them comfort and healing. Yes, they were glad to shout and clap hands, when, as Chevaliers of the Order of Leopold, the ribbon and star pendant were pinned on the breast of the sturdy Mrs. Bracher, and the silent, charming Scotch. The band bashed the cymbals and beat the drum, and the wind instruments roared approval. And the modest young King saluted the two brave ladies.

In a shop door, a couple of hundred yards from the ceremony, Hilda was standing quietly watching the joyous crowds and their King. Pushing through the throng that hemmed her in, a massive man came and stood by her.

"Ah, Mr. Barkleigh," said Hilda, "this is a surprise."

"It's a shame," he began.

"What's a shame?" asked Hilda.

"Why aren't they decorating you? You're the bravest of the lot."

"By no means," said Hilda; "those

two women deserve all that is coming to them. I am glad they are getting their pretty ribbon."

With a sudden nervous gesture, Barkleigh unfastened the bright decorations on his chest, and placed them in Hilda's hand.

"Take them and wear them," he said, "I have no heart for them any more. They are yours."

"I didn't win them, so I can't wear them," she answered, and started to hand them back.

"No, I won't take them back," he said harshly, brushing her hand from him, "if you won't wear them, keep them. Hide them, throw them away. I'm done with them. I can't wear them any more since that afternoon in Nieuport."

Hilda pinned the ribbons upon his coat.

"I decorate you," she said, "for, verily, you are now worthy."

THE BELGIAN REFUGEE

By acts not his own, his consciousness is crowded with horror. Names of his ancient cities which should ring pleasantly in his ear — Louvain, Dinant, Malines: there is an echo of the sound of bells in the very names — recall him to his suffering. No indemnity will cleanse his mind of the vileness committed on what he loved. By every aspect of a once-prized beauty, the face of his torment is made more clear. Of all that fills the life of memory — the secure home, the fruitful village and the well-loved land — there is no acre remaining where his thought can rest. Each remembered place brings a sharper stroke of poignancy to the mind that is dispossessed.

His is a mental life uprooted and flung out into a vast loneliness. Where can his thought turn when it would heal itself? To the disconsolate there has always been

comfort in recalling the early home where childhood was nourished, the orchard and the meadow where first love came to the meeting, the eager city where ambition, full-panoplied, sprang from the brain. The mind is hung with pictures of what once was. But there must always be a local habitation for these rekindled heats. Somewhere, in scene and setting, the boy played, the youth loved, the man struggled. That richness of feeling is interwoven with a place. No passion or gladness comes out of the buried years without some bit of the soil clinging to it.

Now, in a passing autumn, for a nation of people, all places are alike to them bitter in the recollection. The Belgian, disinherited, can never summon a presence out of the past which will not, in its coming, bring burning and slaughter. All that was fair in his consciousness has been seared with horror. Where can he go to be at home? To England? To a new continent? What stranger-city will give

him back his memories? He is condemned forever to live in the moment, never to let his mind stray over the past. For, in the past, in gracious prospect, lie village and city of Flanders, and the name of the ravaged place will suddenly release a cloud of darkness with voices of pain.

III

ROLLO, THE APOLLO

MRS. BRACHER was just starting on one of her excursions from Pervyse into Furnes. Her tiny first-aid hospital, hidden in the battered house, needed food, clothing, and dressings for the wounded. One morning when the three nurses were up in the trenches, a shell had dug down into their cellar and spilled ruin. Now, it is not well to live in a place which a gun has located, because modern artillery is fine in its workings to a hair's-breadth, and can repeat its performance to a fractional inch. So the little houshold had removed themselves from the famous cellar to a half-shattered house, which had one whole living-room on the ground floor, good for wounded and for the serving of meals; and one unbroken bedroom

on the first floor, large enough for three tired women.

"Any errands, girls?" she called to her two assistants as she mounted to her seat on the motor ambulance.

"Bring me a man," begged Hilda. "Bring back some one to stir things up."

Indeed, it had been slow for the nurses during the last fortnight. They were "at the front," but the front was peaceful. After the hot toil of the autumn attack and counter-attack, there had come a deadlock to the wearied troops. They were eaten up with the chill of the moist earth, and the perpetual drizzle. So they laid by their machine guns, and silently wore through the grey days.

Victor, the orderly, cranked the engine for Mrs. Bracher, and she hummed merrily away. She drove the car. She was not going to have any fumbling male hand spoil that sweetly running motor. She had chosen the battle-front

in Flanders as the perfect place for vindicating woman's courage, coolness, and capacity for roughing it. She was determined to leave not one quality of initiative and daring to man's monopoly. If he had worn a decoration for some "nervy" hazardous trait, she came prepared to pluck it from his swelling pride, cut it in two pieces and wear her half of it.

Her only delay was a mile in from Pervyse. The engine choked, and the car grunted to a standstill. She was in front of a deserted farm-house. She had a half hope that there might be soldiers billeted there. In that case, she could ask one of them to step out and start up the engine for her. Cranking a motor is severe on even a sturdy woman. She climbed out over the dashboard from the wheel side, and entered the door-yard. The barn had been demolished by shells. The ground around the house was pitted with shell-holes, a foot

deep, three feet deep, one hole six feet deep. The chimney of the house had collapsed from a well-aimed obus. Mrs. Bracher knocked at the door, and shook it. But there was no answer. The house carried that silent horror of a deserted and dangerous place. It seemed good to her to come away from it, and return to the motor. She bent her back to the crank, and set the engine chugging. It was good to travel along to the sight of a human face.

"No one stationed there?" she asked of the next sentinel.

"It is impossible, Madame," he replied; "the enemy have located it exactly with a couple of their guns. Not one day passes but they throw their shells around it."

As Mrs. Bracher completed the seven-mile run, and tore into the Grand Place of Furnes, she was greeted by cheers from the populace. And, indeed, she was a striking figure in her yellow

leather jerkin, her knee-breeches and puttees, and her shining yellow "doggy" boots. She carried all the air of an officer planning a desperate coup. As she cut her famous half-moon curve from the north-east corner of the Place by the Gendarmerie over to the Hotel at the south-west, she saluted General de Wette standing on the steps of the Municipal Building. He, of course, knew her. Who of the Belgian army did not know those three unquenchable women living up by the trenches on the Yser? He gravely saluted the streak of yellow as it flashed by. Just when she was due to bend the curb or telescope her front wheel, she threw in the clutch, and, with a shriek of metal and a shiver of parts, the car came to a stop. She jumped out from it and strode away from it, as if it were a cast-off ware which she was never to see again. She entered the restaurant. At three of the tables sat officers of the Belgian regiments —

lieutenants, two commandants, one captain. At the fourth table, in the window, was dear little Doctor Neil McDonnell, beaming at the velocity and sensation of her advent.

"You come like a yellow peril," said he. "If you are not careful, you will make more wounded than you heal."

"Never," returned Mrs. Bracher, firmly; "it is always in control."

The Doctor, who was a considerate as well as a brave leader, well knew how restricted was the diet under which those loyal women lived in the chilly house, caring for "les blessés" among the entrenched soldiers. So he extended himself in ordering an ample and various meal, which would enable Mrs. Bracher to return to her bombarded dug-out with renewed vigor.

"What's the news?" she asked, after she had broken the back of her hunger.

"We are expecting a new member for our corps," replied the Doctor, "a

young cyclist of the Belgian army. He fought bravely at Liège and Namur, and later at Alost. But since Antwerp, his division has been disbanded, and he has been wandering about. We met him at Dunkirk. We saw at once how valuable he would be to us, with his knowledge of French and Flemish, and his bravery."

"Which ambulance will he go out with?" asked Mrs. Bracher.

"He will have a touring-car of his own," replied Dr. McDonnell.

"I thought you said he was a cyclist," objected Mrs. Bracher.

"I gave him an order on Calais," explained the Doctor. "He went down there and selected a speed-car. I'm expecting him any minute," he added.

The short afternoon had waned away into brief twilight, and then, with a suddenness, into the blackness of the winter night. As they two faced out into the Grand Place, there was depth on

depth of black space, from which came the throb of a motor, the whistle of a soldier, the clatter of hooves on cobbles. Only out from their window there fell a short-reaching radiance that spread over the sidewalk and conquered a few feet of the darkness beyond.

Into this thin patch of brightness, there rode a grey car, two-seated, long, slim, pointed for speed. The same rays of the window lamp sufficed to light up the features of the sole occupant of the car: — high cheek-bones, thin cheeks, and pale face, tall form.

"There he is," said Dr. McDonnell, enthusiastically; "there's our new member."

With a stride of power, the green-clad warrior entered the café, and saluted Dr. McDonnell.

"Ready for work," he said.

"I see you are," answered Dr. McDonnell. "Will you sit down and join us?"

"Gladly — in a moment. But I must

first go across the square and see a Gendarme."

"Your car is built for speed," put in Mrs. Bracher.

"One hundred and twenty kilometres, the hour," answered the new-comer. "Let me see, in your language that will be seventy miles an hour. Swift, is it not?"

"Why the double tires?" she asked.

"You have a quick eye," he answered. "I like always the extra tires, you never know in war where the break-down will come. It is well to be ready."

He flashed a smile at her, saluted the Doctor and left the café.

"What a man!" exclaimed Dr. McDonnell.

"That's what I say," agreed Mrs. Bracher. "What a man!"

"Look at him," continued the Doctor.

"I did, hard," answered Mrs. Bracher.

Mrs. Bracher, Hilda, and Scotch, were

the extreme advance guard of Doctor McDonnell's Motor Ambulance Corps. The rest of the Corps lived in the Convent hospital in Furnes. It was here that the newcomer and his speed-car were made welcome. He was a success from the moment of his arrival. He was easily the leading member of the Corps. He had a careless way with him. Being tall and handsome, he could be indifferent and yet hold the interest. To women that arrogance even added to his interest. His costume was very splendid — a dark green cloth which set off his straight form; the leather jacket, which made him look like some craftsman; the jaunty cap, which emphasized the high cheek-bones in the lean face. Both his face and his figure being spare, he promised energy. He had the knack of making a sensation whenever he appeared. Only a few among mortals are gifted that way. Most of us have to get our own slippers and light our own cigars.

But he was able to convey the idea that it was a privilege to serve him. The busy superintendent of the hospital, a charming Italian woman, cooked special meals for him, and served them in his room, so that he would not be contaminated by contact with the Ambulance Corps, a noisy, breezy group. A boy scout pulled his boots off and on for him, oiled his machine, and cranked his motor. The lean cheeks filled out, the restless, audacious, roving eyes tamed down. A sleekness settled over his whole person. It was like discovering a hungry, prowling night cat, homeless and winning its meat by combat, and bringing that cat to the fireside and supplying it with copious cream, and watching it fill out and stretch itself in comfort.

There was a song just then that had a lilting chorus. It told of 'Rollo, the Apollo, the King of the Swells.' So the Corps named their new member Rollo. How wonderful he was with his pride of

bearing, and the insolent way of him. He moved like an Olympian through the herd of shabby little scrambling folk.

"Is it ever hot out your way?" queried Rollo during one of Mrs. Bracher's flying visits to Furnes.

"I could hardly call it hot," replied the nurse. "The walls of our house, that is, the fragments of them left standing, are full of shrapnel. The road outside our door is dented with shell holes. Every house in the village is shot full of metal. There's a battery of seven Belgian guns spitting away in our back-yard. But we don't call it hot, because we hate to exaggerate."

"I'll have to come out and see you," he said, with a smile.

He became a frequent visitor at Pervyse.

"Rollo is wonderful," exclaimed Hilda.

"How wonderful?" asked Mrs. Bracher.

"Only to-day," explained Hilda, "he showed me his field-glasses, which he

had taken from the body of a German officer whom he killed at Alost."

"That's true," corroborated Scotch, "and once in his room at the hospital he showed me a sable helmet. Scarlet cloth and gold braid, and the hussar fur all over it. It's a beauty. I wish he'd give it to me."

"How did he get it?" asked Mrs. Bracher.

"He shot an officer in the skirmish at Zele."

"He must have been a busy man with his rifle," commented Mrs. Bracher.

"He was. He was," said Hilda. "Why, he's shot fifty-one men, since the war began."

"Does he keep notches on his rifle?" queried Mrs. Bracher.

"I think it's a privilege to have a man as brave as he is going out with us," replied Hilda. "We must bore him frightfully."

"He's peaceful enough now, isn't he,"

observed Mrs. Bracher, "trotting around with a Red Cross Ambulance Corps. I should think he'd miss the old days."

Hilda and Mrs. Bracher were having an early morning stroll.

"It's a little too hot up by the trenches," said the nurse; "we'll take the Furnes road."

"It was a wet night, last night," commented she, after they had trudged along for a few minutes.

"Are you going to walk me to Furnes?" asked Hilda.

"You're losing your prairie zip," retorted Mrs. Bracher. "You ought to be glad of the air, after that smelly straw."

"The air is better than the mud," returned Hilda, holding up a boot, which had gathered part of the roadway to itself.

"We'll be there in a minute," said the nurse.

"Where's there?" asked Hilda.

"Right here," answered Mrs. Bracher.

They had come to the deserted farm-house where she had once met with her delay and where she had knocked in vain.

"See here," she exclaimed.

"Wheel marks," said Hilda.

"Motor-car tracks," corrected Mrs. Bracher.

The soggy turf that led from the road into the door-yard of the farm-house was deeply and freshly indented.

"Perhaps some one's here now," suggested Hilda.

"Never fear," answered the nurse. "It's night work.

"Up to two weeks ago," she went on, "this farm was shot at, every day, from over the Yser. Since then, it hasn't been shelled at all."

"What of it?" asked Hilda.

"We'll see," said Mrs. Bracher. "It always pays to get up early, doesn't it, my dear?"

"I don't know," returned the girl, dubiously. She was footsore with Mrs. Bracher's speed.

"Well, that's enough for one morning," concluded the nurse, with one last look about the farm.

"I should think it was," agreed Hilda.

They returned to their dressing-station.

It was early evening, and the nurses had finished their frugal supper. With the dishes cleared away, they were sitting for a cosy chat about the table. Overhead hung a lamp, with a base so broad that it cast a heavy shadow on the table under it. There was a fire of coals in the little corner stove, and through the open door of the stove a friendly glow spread out into the room. As they sat there resting and talking, a tap-tap came at the window.

"Ah, the Commandant is back," said Hilda. The women brightened up. The door opened and their good friend,

Commandant Jost, entered. He was a man tall and slender and closely-knit, with a rich vein of sentiment, like all good soldiers. He was perhaps fifty-two or three years of age. His eyebrows slanted down and his moustache slanted up. His eyes were level and keen in their beam of light, and they puckered into genial lines when he smiled. His nose was bent in just at the bridge, where a bullet once ploughed past. This mishap had turned up the end of a large and formerly straight feature. It was good to have him back again after his fortnight away. The evening broke pleasantly with talk of common friends in the trenches.

There came a ring at the door. A knob at the outer door pulled a string that ran to their room and released a tiny tinkle. Victor, the orderly, answered the ring. He had a message for the Commandant. Jost held it high up to read it by the lamp. Hilda brought a lighted candle, and placed it

on the table. He sat down, wrote his answer, and gave it to the waiting soldier. He returned, closed the door, and looked straight into the face of each of his friends.

"You have to go?" asked Hilda.

"We expect an attack," he answered. It was then 9:30.

"What time?" asked Hilda.

"The Dixmude and Ramskappele attacks were just before dawn. When the mists begin to rise, and the enemy can see even dimly, then they attack. I think they will attack to-night, just so."

"How does that concern you?" asked Hilda. "What do you have to do?"

"I have just asked my Colonel that I take thirty of my men and guard the section in front of the railroad tracks. That is where they will come through."

"What is the situation in the trenches, to-night?" asked Hilda.

"We have only a handful. Not more than fifty men."

"Not more than fifty!" cried Mrs. Bracher. "How many mitrailleuse have you at the railroad?"

"Six, two in the second story of the house, and four in the station opposite."

"Six ought to be enough to rake the road."

"Yes, but they won't come down the road," explained Jost; "they will come across the flooded field on rafts, with machine guns on the rafts. They can come down on both sides of the trench, and rake the trench. What can fifty men do against four or five machine guns? They will have to run like hares, or else be shot down to a man. They can rake the trenches for two miles on each side."

"What will happen if the Germans get on top of the trenches?" asked Mrs. Bracher.

"The very first thing they will do — they will place a gun on top of the trench, and rake this whole town. They

can rake the road that leads to Furnes. It would cut off your retreat to Furnes."

That meant the only escape for the women would be through the back-yard, and over fields knee-deep in mud, where dead horses lie loosely buried in hummock graves.

"What do you think we had better do?" asked Hilda. "To leave now seems like shirking our job."

"There'll be no job for you, if the enemy come through to-night," returned the Commandant; "they'll do the job. But listen, you'll have a little time. If you hear rifle fire or mitrailleuse fire on the trenches, then go, as fast as you can run. If you hear as few as only four soldiers running down this road, take to your heels after them. That will be your last chance."

The bell tinkled again. The orderly called the Commandant into the hall. Jost returned with a message. He read it, and pulled out a note-book from his

pocket. He consulted it with care. He sat down at the table, wrote his reply, and gave it to the messenger. He returned, shrugged his shoulders, and went silent. All waited for him to speak. Finally he roused himself.

"The mitrailleuse have only 3500 rounds left to each gun," he said, "and there are no cartridges in the trenches."

"That means," prompted Hilda.

"Four hundred cartridges a minute, those guns fire," he said, "that means eight or nine minutes, and then the Germans."

A pounding came at the front door. A captain entered, throwing his long cape over his shoulder.

"We have no ammunition," he said — "the men have nothing. I've just come from the Colonel."

The Captain was excited, the Commandant silent.

"Shall we evacuate?" Hilda pressed her question with him.

"I cannot answer for you," the Captain said. "If the enemy attack, there's nothing to hold them. They'll come through. If they come, they'll take you women prisoners or kill you. You'll have to make your choice now. There will be no choice then."

"Furnes isn't so prosperous, you know," said Hilda, "even if we did run back there."

Only the day before, Furnes had received a long-distance bombardment that had killed thirty persons and wounded one hundred.

At a word from the Commandant, the orderly left the room. The women heard him drive their ambulance out from shelter, crank up the engine, and run it for five minutes to get it thoroughly heated. Then he turned the engine off, and put a blanket over the radiator, tucking it well in to preserve the heat.

"Let's put what we need into the car," suggested Mrs. Bracher.

They picked up their bags, and went toward the ambulance.

It was pleasant to do something active under that tension. They stepped out into a night of chill and blackness. They could not see ten feet in front of them. It was moon-time but no moon. Heavy clouds were in possession of the sky, weaving a thick texture of darkness.

"There they start," said the Commandant.

Shell fire was beginning from the north, from the direction of the sea.

"They are covering their advance," he went on.

"Those are 21 or 28 Point shells. They are falling short about 1800 yards, but they are coming straight in our direction."

They walked past their car and down the road. They looked across the fields into the black night. Straight down the road a lamp suddenly shone in the gloom. It moved to and fro, and up

and down. There was regularity in its motion. A great shaft of answering white light shot up into the night from the north.

"They are signalling from inside our line here," said the Commandant, "over there to the enemy guns beyond Ramskappele. Some spy down here with a flash-lamp is telling them that we're out of ammunition."

"But can't we catch the spy?" urged Hilda. "That light doesn't look to be more than a few hundred yards away."

"That is further away than it looks," answered Jost; "that's all of a mile away. He's hidden somewhere in a field."

Mrs. Bracher seized Victor by the arm, and faced the Commandant.

"I know where he's hidden," she cried. "Let me show you."

The Commandant nodded assent.

"Messieurs, les Belges," she commanded in a sharp, high voice, "come with me and move quickly!"

She brought them back to the car.

"Send for four of your men," she said to Jost. They came.

"Wait in the house," she said to Hilda.

"Now we start," Mrs. Bracher ordered. "Victor, you take the wheel. Drive down the Furnes road."

They drove in silence for five minutes, till her quick eye picked a landmark out of the dimness.

"Drive the car slowly past, and on down the road," she ordered, "don't stop it. We six must dismount while it is moving. Surround the house quietly. The Commandant and I will enter by the front door."

They had come to the deserted farmhouse. It loomed dimly out of the vacant fields and against the background of travelling clouds. Victor stayed at the wheel. Mrs. Bracher, the Commandant, and the four soldiers, jumped off into the road. The six silently filed into the door-yard. The four soldiers

melted into the night. Mrs. Bracher caught the handle of the door firmly and shoved. The door gave way. She and Jost stepped inside. The Commandant drew his pistol. He flashed his pocket light down the hall and up the stairs. There was nothing but vacancy. They passed into the room at their right hand. Jost's light searched its way around the room. In the corner, stood a tall soldier, dressed in green.

"Let me introduce Monsieur Rollo, the spy," said Mrs. Bracher. There was triumph in her voice. The Commandant put a whistle to his lips and blew. His four men came stamping in, pistols in hand.

"Clever device, this," said Mrs. Bracher. She had stooped and lifted out a large electric flash lamp from under a sweater.

"Clever woman, this," said the Commandant, saluting Mrs. Bracher. "How did you come to know the place?"

"Monsieur Rollo uses double tires on a wet soil," she explained.

"Monsieur Rollo will now bring his signal lamp outside the house," the Commandant said curtly. "He will signal the enemy that our reinforcements and ammunition have arrived, and that an attack to-night will be hopeless. He may choose to signal wrongly. In that case, you men will shoot him on the instant that firing begins at Pervyse."

The soldiers nodded. They marched Rollo to the field, and thrust his signal lamp into his hands.

"One moment," he said. He turned to Mrs. Bracher.

"Where is the American girl to-night?" he asked.

"At Pervyse, of course," replied the nurse, "where she always is. The very place where you wanted to bring your men through and kill us all."

"I had forgotten," he said. "If Mademoiselle Hilda is at Pervyse, then I

signal, as you suggest" — he turned to the Commandant — "but not because you order it — you and your little pop-guns."

Mrs. Bracher sniffed scornfully.

"One last bluff of a bluffer, as Hilda would say," she muttered.

The soldiers stood in circle in the mud of the field, the tall green-clad figure in their midst.

Rollo turned on the blinding flash that stabbed through the night. He held it high above his head, and at that level moved it three times from left to right. Then he swung the light in full circles, till it became a pinwheel of flame. Four miles away by the sea to the north, a white light shot up into the sky, rose twice like a fountain, and was followed by a starlight that fed out a green radiance.

"The attack is postponed," he said.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

The German lay on a stretcher in the straw of the first dressing-station. His legs had been torn by shot. He was in pain. He looked into the faces of the men about him, the French doctors and dressers, the Belgian infantry. The lantern light was white and yellow on their faces. He drew out from the inner pocket of his mouse-colored coat a packet of letters, and from the packet the picture of a stout woman, who, like himself, was of middle-age. He handed it to the French doctor. "Meine Frau," he said.

At the outer rim of the group, a Belgian drew a knife, ran it lightly across his own throat, and pointed mockingly to the German on the stretcher.

IV

THE PIANO OF PERVYSE

THE Commandant stepped down from his watch tower by the railway tracks. This watch tower was a house that had been struck but not tumbled by the bombardment. It was black and gashed, and looked deserted. That was the merit of it, for every minute of the day and night, some watcher of the Belgians sat in the window, one flight up, by the two machine guns, gazing out over the flooded fields, and the thin white strip of road that led eastward to the enemy trenches. Once, fifteen mouse-colored uniforms had made a sortie down the road and toward the house, but the eye at the window had sighted them, and let them draw close till the aim was very

sure. Since then, there had been no one coming down the road. But a watcher, turn by turn, was always waiting. The Commandant liked the post, for it was the key to the safety of Pervyse. He felt he was guarding the three women, when he sat there on the rear supports of a battered chair, and smoked and peered out into the east.

He came slowly down the road, — old wounds were throbbing in his members — and, as always, turned into the half-shattered dwelling where the nurses were making their home and tending their wounded.

"How is the sentry-box to-night?" asked Hilda.

"Draughty," said the Commandant, with a shiver; "it rocks in the wind."

"You must have some rag-time," prescribed Hilda, and seated herself at the piano.

It was Pervyse's only piano, untouched by shell and shrapnel, and nightly it

sounded the praise of things. The little group drew close about the American girl, as she led them in a "coon song."

"I say," said Hilda, looking up from the keys, "would any one believe it?"

"Believe what?" asked Mrs. Bracher.

"The lot of us here, exchanging favorites, with war just outside our window. I tell you," repeated Hilda, "no one would believe it."

"They don't have to," retorted Mrs. Bracher, sharply. She had grown weary of telling folks at home how matters stood, and then having them say, "Fancy now, really?"

The methodical guns had pounded the humanity out of Pervyse, and, with the living, had gone music and art. There was nowhere in the wasted area for the tired soldiers to find relief from their monotony. War is a dreary thing. With one fixed idea in the mind — to wait, to watch for some careless head over the mounded earth, and then to

kill — war is drearier than slave labor, more nagging than an imperfect marriage, more dispiriting than unsuccessful sin. The pretty brass utensils of the dwellings had been pillaged. Canvas, which had once contained bright faces, was in shreds. The figures of Christ and his friends that had stood high in the niches of the church, had fallen forward on their faces. All the little devices of beauty, cherished by the villagers, had been shattered.

One perfect piano had been left unmarred by all the destruction that had robbed the place of its instruments of pleasure. With elation and laughter the soldiers had discovered it, when the early fierceness of the attack had ebbed. Straightway they carried it to the home of the women.

When the Commandant first saw it, soon after its arrival in their living-room, he beamed all over.

"The Broadwood," he said. "How

that brings back the memories! When I was a young man once in Ostend, I was one of eight to play with Paderewski, that great musician. Yes, together we played through an afternoon. And the instrument on which I played was a Broadwood. I cannot now ever see it, without remembering that day in the Kursaal, and how he led us with that fingering, that vigor. Do you know how he lifts his hand high over the keys and then drops suddenly upon them?"

"Yes, I have seen it," said Hilda; "like the swoop of an eagle."

"I do not know that bird," returned the Commandant, "but that is it. It is swift and strong. He comes out of a stricken country, too; that is why he can play."

"I wonder, feeling that way, that you ever gave up your music," said Hilda. "Why didn't you go on with it?"

"I had thought of it. But there was always something in me that called, and

I went into the army. For years we have known this thing was coming. A man could not do otherwise than hold himself ready for that. And now it is left to you young people to go on — always the new harmony, that sings in the ears, and never comes into the notes."

The Commandant, Commandant Jost, was perhaps the best of all their soldier friends. He was straight and sturdy, a pine-tree of a man in his early fifties. He was famous in Flanders for his picked command of 110, all of them brave as he was brave, ready to be wiped out because of their heart of courage. Often the strength of his fighting group was sapped, till one could count his men on the fingers of the hands. But always there were fresh fellows ready to go the road with him. He never ordered them into danger. He merely called for volunteers. When he went up against absurd odds, and was left for dead, his men returned for him, and brought him away for

another day. His time hadn't come, he said. It was no use shooting him down, and clipping the bridge from his nose, — when his day came, he would be done for, but not ahead of that. This valiant Belgian soldier was a mystic of war.

In the trenches and at the hospitals, Hilda had met a race of prophets, men who carry about foreknowledge and premonitions. Sturdy bearded fellows who salute you as men about to die. They are perfectly cheery, as brave as the unthinking at their side, but they tramp firmly to a certain end. War lets loose the rich life of subconsciousness which most mortals keep bottled up in the sleepy secular days of humdrum. Peril and sudden death uncork those heady vapors, and sharpen the super-senses. This race of men with their presciences have no quarrel with death. They have made their peace with it. It is merely that they carry a foreknowledge of it —

they are sure they will know when it is on the way.

No man of the troops was more smitten with second-sight, than this friend of the Pervyse women, this courageous Commandant. His eyes were level to command, but they grew distant and luminous when his mood was on him. This gift in him called out the like in other men, and his pockets were heavy with the keepsakes of young soldiers, a photograph of the beloved, a treasured coin, a good-bye letter, which he was commissioned to carry to the dear one, when the giver should fall. With little faith that he himself would execute the commissions, he had carefully labelled each memento with the name and address of its destination. For he knew that whatever was found on his body, the body of the fighting Commandant, the King's friend, would receive speedy forwarding to its appointed place.

It was an evening of spring, but spring had come with little promise that way. Ashes of homes and the sour dead lay too thickly over those fields, for nature to make her great recovery in one season. The task was too heavy for even her vast renewals. Patience, she seemed to say, I come again.

The Commandant was sitting at ease enjoying his pipe.

"Mademoiselle Hilda," said he. Hilda was sitting at the piano, but no tunes were flowing. She was behaving badly that evening and she knew it. She fumbled with the sheaves of music, and chucked Scotch under the chin, and doctored the candles. She was manifesting all the younger elements in her twenty-two years.

"Mademoiselle Hilda," insisted the Commandant. He was sentimental, and full of old-world courtesies, but he was used to being obeyed. Hilda became rapt in contemplating a candlestick.

"Mademoiselle Hilda, a little music, if you please," he said with a finality.

"You play," said Hilda to Scotch, sliding off the soap-box which served to uphold the artist to her instrument.

"Hilda, you make me tired," chided Scotch. "The Commandant has given you his orders."

"Oh, all right," said Hilda.

She played pleasantly with feeling and technique. More of her hidden life came to an utterance with her music than at other times. She led her notes gently to a close.

"Mademoiselle Hilda," said the Commandant from his seat in the shadows on the sofa, "parlez-vous français?"

This was his regular procedure. Why did he say it? They never could guess. He knew that the women, all three, understood French — Mrs. Bracher and Scotch speaking it fluently, Hilda, as became an American, haltingly. Did he not carry on most of his converse with

them in French — always, when eloquent or sentimental? But unfailingly he used his formula, when he was highly pleased. They decided he must once have known some fair foreigner who could only faintly stammer in his native tongue, and that the habit of address had then become fixed upon him for moments of emotion.

He repeated his question.

"Oui," responded the girl. He kissed his fingers lightly to her, and waved the tribute in her direction, as if it could be wafted across the room.

"Chère artiste," said he, with a voice of conviction.

"And now the bacarolle," he pleaded.

"There are many bacarolles," she objected.

"I know, I know," he said, "and yet, after all, there is only one bacarolle."

"All right," she answered, obediently, and played on. The music died away, and the girl in her fought against the response that she knew was coming. She

began turning over sheets of music on the rack. But the Commandant was not to be balked.

"Parlez-vous français?" he inquired, "vous, Mademoiselle Hilda."

"Oui, mon Commandant," she answered.

"Chère artiste," he said; "chère artiste."

"Ah, those two voices," he went on with a sigh; "they go with you, wherever you are. It is music, that night of love and joy. And here we sit —"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Bracher, who did not care to have an evening of gaiety sag to melancholy; "how about a little César Franck?"

"Yes, surely," agreed the Commandant, cheerily; "our own composer, you know, though we never gave him his due."

Hilda ran through the opening of the D Minor.

"Now it is your turn," said she.

"My fingers are something stiff, with these cold nights by the window," replied the Commandant, "but certainly I will endeavor to play."

He seated himself at the instrument.

"Chère artiste," he murmured to the girl, who was retreating to the lounge.

The Commandant played well. He needed no notes, for he was stored with remembered bits. He often played to them of an evening, before he took his turn on watch. He played quietly along for a little. Out of the dark at their north window, there came the piping of a night bird. Birds were the only creatures seemingly untouched by the war. The fields were crowded thick with the bodies of faithful cavalry and artillery horses. Dogs and cats had wasted away in the seared area. Cattle had been mowed down by machine guns. Heavy sows and their tiny yelping litter, were shot as they trundled about, or, surviving the far-cast invisible death,

were spitted for soldiers' rations. And with men, the church-yard and the fields, and even the running streams, were choked. Only birds of the air, of all the living, had remained free of their element, floating over the battling below them, as blithe as if men had not sown the lower spaces with slaughter.

And now in this night of spring, one was calling to its mate. The Commandant heard it, and struck its note on the upper keyboard.

"Every sound in nature has its key," he said; "the cry of the little bird has it, and the surf at Nieuport."

"And the shells?" asked Hilda.

"Yes, the shells, they have it," he answered gravely; "each one of them, as it whistles in the air, is giving its note. You have heard it?"

"Yes," answered Hilda.

"Why, this," he said. He held his hands widely apart to indicate the keyboard — "this is only a little human

dipping, like a bucket, into the ocean waves of sound. It can't give us back one little part of what is. Only a poor, stray sound out of the many can get itself registered. The rest drift away, lost birds on the wing. The notes in between, the splintered notes, they cannot sound on our little instruments."

A silence had fallen on the group. Out of the hushed night that covered them, a moaning grew, that they knew well. One second, two seconds of it, and then the thud fell somewhere up the line. As the shell was wailing in the air, a hidden string, inside the frame, quivered through its length, and gave out an under-hum. It was as if a far away call had rung it up. One gun alone, out of all the masked artillery, had found the key, and, from seven miles away, played the taut string.

"There is one that registers," said the Commandant; "the rest go past and no echo here."

Firmly he struck the note that had vibrated.

"That gun is calling for me," said he; "the others are lost in the night. But that gun will find me."

"You talk like a soothsayer," said Mrs. Bracher, with a sudden gesture of her hand and arm, as if she were brushing away a mist.

"It's all folly," she went on, "I don't believe it. Good heavens, what is that?" she added, as a footstep crunched in the hall-way. "You've got me all unstrung, you and your croaking."

An orderly entered and saluted the Commandant.

"They've got the range of the Station, mon Commandant," he reported; "they have just sent a shell into the tracks. It is dangerous in the look-out of the house. Do you wish Victor to remain?"

"I will relieve him," said the Commandant, and he left swiftly and silently, as was his wont.

Hilda returned to the piano, and began softly playing, with the hush-pedal on. The two women drew close around her. Suddenly she released the pedal, and lifted her hands from the keys, as if they burned her. One string was still faintly singing which she had not touched, the string of the key that the Commandant had struck.

"Mercy, child, what ails you?" exclaimed Mrs. Bracher. "You've all got the fidgets to-night."

"That string again," said the girl.

She rose from the piano, and went out into the night. They heard her footsteps on the road.

"Hilda, Hilda," called Scotch, loudly.

"Leave her alone, she is fey," said Mrs. Bracher. "I know her in these moods. You can't interfere. You must let her go."

"We can at least see where she goes," urged Scotch.

They followed her at a distance. She

went swiftly up the road, and straight to the railway tracks. She entered the house, the dark, wrecked house, where from the second story window, a perpetual look-out was kept, like the watch of the Vestal Virgins. They came to the open door, and heard her ascend to the room of the vigil.

"You must come," they heard her say, "come at once."

"No, no," answered the voice of the Commandant, "I am on duty here. But you — what brings you here? You cannot stay. Go at once. I order you."

"I shall not go till you go," the girl replied in expressionless tones.

"I tell you to go," repeated the Commandant in angry but suppressed voice.

"You can shoot me," said the girl, "but I will not go without you. Come — " her voice turned to pleading — "Come, while there is time."

"My time has come," said the Commandant. "It is here — my end."

"Then for me, too," she said, "but I have come to take you from it."

There was a silence of a few seconds, then the sound of a chair scraping the floor, heavy boots on the boarding, and the two, Commandant and girl, descending the stairs. Unastonished, they stepped out and found the two women waiting.

"We must save the girl," said the Commandant. "Come, run for it, all of you, run!"

He pushed them forward with his hands, and back down the road they had come. He ran and they ran till they reached their dwelling, and entered, and stood at the north window, looking over toward the dim house from which they had escaped. Out from the still night of darkness, came a low thunder from beyond the Yser. In the tick of a pulse-beat, the moaning of a shell throbbed on the air and, with instant vibrancy, the singing string of the piano at their back

answered the flight of the shell. And in the same breath, they heard a roar at the railroad, and the crash of timbers. Soft licking flames broke out in the house of the Belgian watchers. Slowly but powerfully, the flames gathered volume, and swept up their separate tongues into one bright blaze, till the house was a bonfire against the heavy sky.

LOST

There were cities in Belgium of medieval loveliness, where the evening light lay in deep purple on canals seeping at foundations of castle and church, with the sacred towers tall in the sky, and a moon just over them, and a star or two beside.

That beauty has been torn out of a man's consciousness and spoiled to his love for ever, by moving up a howitzer and priming it with destruction. First, the rumble of the gun from far away, then the whistle of flying metal, sharpening its anger as it nears, then the thud and roar of explosion as it clutches and dissolves its mark. Now its seven-mile journey is ended. It has found its home and its home is a ruin. Over the peaceful earth and under a silent sky, bits of destruction are travelling, projections of the human will. Where lately there was a soft outline, rising from the

soil as if the stones of the field had been called together by the same breath that spread the forest, now there is a heap of rock-dust. Man, infinite in faculty, has narrowed his devising to the uses of havoc. He has lifted his hand against the immortal part of himself. He has said — "The works I have wrought I will turn back to the dust out of which they came."

All the good labor of minds and hands which we cannot bring back is undone in an instant of time by a few pounds of chemical. That can be burned and broken in the passage of one cloud over the moon which not all the years of a century will restore. Seasons return, but not to us returns the light in the windows of Rheims.

V

WAR

THERE fell a day when the call came from Ypres to aid the English. A bitter hot engagement had been fought for seven days, with a hundred and twenty thousand men in action, and the woods and fields on the Hoogar road were strewn with the wounded. Dr. McDonnell, the head of the Ambulance Corps, rode over from Furnes to the shell-blackened house of the nurses in Pervyse. With him he brought Woffington, a young Englishman, to drive the ambulance. He asked Hilda to go with them to Ypres.

"Scotch, English and American, all on one seat," said Hilda with a smile.

They covered the thirty miles in one hour, and went racing through the city

of Ypres, eastward toward the action. Half way out to the noise of artillery, their car was stopped by an English officer, handsome, courteous, but very firm.

"You cannot go out on this road," he said.

"We will be back before you know it," pleaded Hilda. "We will bring back your wounded. Let me show you."

"Report to me on your way back," he ordered. "My name is Fitzgerald, Captain Fitzgerald."

They rode on. All down the road, straggled wounded men, three miles of them limped, they held up a red hand, they carried a shattered arm in a sling. There was blood on their faces. They walked with bowed head, tired.

"These are the lucky ones," said Woffington, "they only got scotched."

That was the famous battle of Ypres. Of the dead there were more than the mothers of a countryside could replace in two generations. But death is war's

best gift. War's other gifts are malicious — fever and plague, and the maiming of strength, and the fouling of beauty — shapely bodies tortured to strange forms, eager young faces torn away. Death is choicer than that, a release from the horror of life trampled like a filthy weed.

"Mons was a birthday party to this," said a Tommy to Hilda. "They're expecting too much of us. The whole thing is put on us to do, and it takes a lot of doing."

Dr. McDonnell and Woffington loaded the car with the severest of the cases, and returned to the white house of the Officer. He was waiting for them, grim, attentive.

Hilda flung up the hood: — two Tommies at length on the stretchers on one side of the car; opposite them, seven Tommies in a row with hand, arm, foot, leg, shoulder, neck and breast wounds. It was too good a piece of rescue work to be strangled with Red Tape. The

Officer could not refrain from a smile of approval.

"You may work along this road," he said, "but look out for the other officers. They will probably stop you. But, remember, my permission holds good only for to-day. Then you must go back. This isn't according to regulations. Now, go on to the hospital."

Ten minutes more, and they swung inside the great iron gates of the Sisters of Mercy. Never had Hilda felt the war so keenly as now. She had been dealing with it bit by bit. But here it was spread out beyond all dealing with. She had to face it without solutions.

There, in the Convent, known now as Military Hospital Number One, was row after row of Khaki men in bed. They had overflowed to the stone floor down the long corridors, hundreds of yards of length, and every foot close packed, like fish in a tin, with helpless outstretched men. The grey stones and

the drab suits on the bundles of straw, — what a backwash from the tides of slaughter. If a man stood on his feet, he had to reach for a cane. There were no whole men there, except the busy stretcher-bearers bringing in new tenants for the crowded smelly place.

As quickly as they could unload their men, and stuff them into the corridor, Hilda and the doctor and Woffington sped back down the line, and up to the thronged dressing-stations. Wounded men were not their only charge, nor their gravest. They took in a soldier sobbing from the shock of the ceaseless shell fire. The moaning and wasp-like buzz of the flying metal, then the earth-shaking thud of its impact, and the roar of its high explosive, had played upon nerves not elastic enough to absorb the strain, till the man became a whimpering child. And they carried in a man shaking from ague, a big, fine fellow, trembling in every part, who

could not lift a limb to walk. That which had been rugged enough for a lifetime of work became palsied after a few weeks of this king's sport. This undramatic slaughter was slower than the work of the guns, but it was as thorough. A man with colic was put into the car.

"I'm bad," he said. The pain kept griping him, so that he rode leaning down with his face pointed at the footboard.

Working as Hilda worked, with her two efficient friends and a well-equipped dressing-station, their own hospital only seven miles to the rear of them, she had been able to measure up to any situation that had been thrust at her. It was buckle to it, and work furiously, and clean up the mess, and then on to the next. But here was a wide-spread misery that overwhelmed her. Dr. McDonnell was as silent as the girl. He had a sensitiveness to suffering which twenty years of London practice had not dulled.

The day wore along, with spurt after spurt to the front, and then the slower drive back, when Woffington guided the car patiently and skilfully, so that the wounded men inside should not be shaken by the motion. They had a snack of luncheon with them, and ate it while they rode. Their little barrel of water, swinging between the wheels, had long ago gone to fevered men.

"First ambulance I've seen in twenty-four hours," said Captain Davies, as he came on them out of the dusk of Hoogar wood. The stern and unbending organization of the military had found it necessary to hold a hundred or more ambulances of the Royal Army Medical Corps in readiness all day in the market place of Ypres against a sudden evacuation. So there were simply no cars, but their one car, to speed out to the front and gather the wounded.

It was strange, in the evening light, to work out along the road between lines

of poplar trees. Dim forms kept passing them — two by two, each couple with a stretcher and its burden. An old farm cart came jogging by, wrenching its body from side to side as it struck invisible hummocks and dipped into shell holes. It was loaded with outstretched forms of men, whose wounds were torn at by the jerking of the cart. In companies, fresh men, talking in whispers, were softly padding along the road on their way to the trenches, to relieve the staled fighters. The wide silence was only broken by the occasional sharp clatter and ping of some lonely sniper's rifle.

It was ten o'clock of the evening, and the ambulance had gone out one mile beyond the hamlet of Hoogar. The Doctor and Hilda alighted at the thick wood, which had been hotly contended for, through the seven days. It had been covered with shell fire as thoroughly as a fishing-net rakes a stream. They

waited for Woffington to turn the car around. It is wise to leave a car headed in the direction of safety, when one is treading on disputed ground.

A man stepped out of the wood.

"Are you Red Cross?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dr. McDonnell, "and we have our motor ambulance here."

"Good!" answered the stranger. "We have some wounded men in the Château at the other side of the wood. Come with me."

"How far?" asked Hilda.

"Oh, not more than half a mile."

They seeped along over the wet wood road, speaking not at all, as snipers were scattered by night here and there in the trees. They came to the old white building, a country house of size and beauty. In the cellar, three soldiers were lying on straw. Two of them told Hilda they had been lying wounded and uncared for in the trenches since evening of the night before. They had just been brought

to the house. She went over to the third, a boy of about eighteen years. He was shot through the biceps muscle of his left arm. He was pale and weak.

"How long have you been like this?" asked the girl.

"Since four o'clock, yesterday," he whispered.

"Thirty hours," said Hilda.

Dr. McDonnell made a request to the officer for help. He gave four men and two stretchers. They put the boy and one of the men on the stretchers, and hoisted them through the cellar window. Woffington and McDonnell took the lantern and searched till they found a wheelbarrow. The third man, wounded in the shoulder, threw an arm over Dr. McDonnell, and Woffington steadied him at the waist. He stumbled up the steps, and collapsed into the barrow.

Woffington and the Doctor took turns in wheeling him through the mud. Hilda

walked at their side. The wheel bit deeply into the road under the weight. They had to spell each other, frequently. After a few hundred yards, they met a small detachment of cavalry, advancing toward the house. The horses seemed to feel the tension, and shared in the silence of their drivers, stepping noiselessly through the murk. Woffington was forced to turn the barrow into the ditch. It required the strength of the two men, one at each handle, to shove it out on the road again.

The stretchers had reached the ambulance ahead of the wheelbarrow. They loaded the car hastily—there was no time to swing stretchers. They put the three wounded in on the long wooden seat. The boy with the torn biceps fainted on Hilda's shoulder. She rode in with him. At Hoogar dressing-station, she asked the military doctor for water for the boy. He had come to, and kept whispering — "Water, water."

"I have no water for you," said the Doctor.

A soldier followed her back to the car and gave the lad to drink from his bottle. There was only a swallow in it.

When they reached the Convent, the officer in charge came running out.

"I'll take this load, but that's all," he said. "Can't take any more, full up. Next trip, go on into the town, to Military Hospital Number Three."

They started back toward the wood.

"I've only got petrol enough for one trip, and then home again," said Woffington.

"All the way, then," said the Doctor, "out to the farthest trenches. We'll make a clean sweep."

They shot past Hoogar, and out through the wood, and on to the trenches of the Cheshires. Just back of the mounded earth, the reserves were sleeping in the mud of the road, and on the wet bank of the ditch. The night was

dark and silent. A few rods to the right, a shelled barn was blazing.

"Have you any wounded?" asked Dr. McDonnell.

"So many we haven't gathered them in," answered the officer. "What is the use? No one to carry them away."

"I'll carry as many as I can," said the Doctor.

"I'll send for them," replied the captain. He spread his men out in the search. Three wounded were placed in the car, all of them stretcher cases.

"Room for one more stretcher case," said Dr. McDonnell; "the car only holds four."

"Bring the woman," ordered the officer.

His men came carrying an aged peasant woman, grey-haired, heavy, her black dress soggy with dew and blood.

"Here's a poor old woman," explained the captain; "seems to be a Belgian peasant. She was working out in the

fields here, while the firing was going on. She was shot in the leg and fell down in the field. She's been lying on her face there all day. Can't you take her out of the way?"

"Surely," said Hilda.

The old woman was heavier than a soldier, heavier and more helpless.

"The car is full," said Hilda; "you have more wounded?"

The officer smiled.

"Of course," he answered; "here come a few of them, now."

The girl counted them. She had to leave twelve men at that farthest trench, because the car was full. On the trip back, she jumped down at the Hoogar dressing-station, and there she found sixteen more men strewed around in the straw, waiting to be removed. Twenty-eight men she had to ride away from.

For the first time in that long day, they went past the Convent-hospital, and

on into the city of Ypres itself, down through the Grand Place, and then abruptly through a narrow street to the south. Here they found Military Hospital Number Three. The wounded men were lifted down and into the courtyard. Lastly, the woman.

"Yes, we'll take her," said the good-hearted Tommies, who lent a hand in unloading the car. But their officer was firm.

"We have no room," he said; "we must keep this hospital for the soldiers. I wish I could help you."

"But what am I to do with her?" asked Hilda in dismay.

"I am sorry," said the officer. He walked away.

"The same old story," said Hilda; "no place for the old in war-time. They'll turn us away from all the hospitals. Anyone who isn't a soldier might as well be dead as in trouble."

The old woman lay on the stretcher

in the street. Her mouth had fallen open, as if she had weakened her hold on things. There was something beyond repair about her appearance, and something unrebuking, too. "Do with me what you please," she seemed to say, "I shall make no complaint. I am too old and feeble to make you any trouble. Leave me here in the gutter if you like. No one will ever blame you for it, surely not I."

"Lift her back," ordered the Doctor; "we'll go hunting."

He had seen a convent near the market square when they had gone through in the morning. They rode to the door, and pulled the hanging wire. The bell resounded down long corridors. Five minutes passed. Then the bolt was shot, and a sleepy-eyed Sister opened the door, candle in hand.

"Sister, I beg you to take this poor old peasant woman in my car," pleaded Hilda, "she is wounded in the leg."

The Sister made no reply but threw the door wide open, then turned and shuffled off down the stone corridor.

"Come," said Hilda; "we have found a home."

The men lifted the stretcher out, and followed the dim twinkling light down the passage. It turned into a great room. They followed in. Every bed was occupied — perhaps fifty old women sleeping there, grey hair and white hair on the pillows, red coverlets over the beds. To the end of the room they went, where one wee little girl was sleeping. The Sister spread bedding on the floor, and lifted the child from the cot. She stretched herself a moment in the chilly sheets, then settled into sleep, with her face, shut-eyed, upturned toward the light. Hilda sighed with relief. Their work was ended.

"Now for home," she said. "Fifteen and a half hours of work."

It was half an hour after midnight,

when they drew up in Ypres market square and glanced down the beautiful length of the Cloth Hall, that building of massive and light-winged proportion. It was the last time they were ever to see it. It has fallen under the shelling, and cannot be rebuilt. They paused to pick their road back to Furnes, for in the darkness it was hard to find the street that led out of the town. They thought they had found it, and went swiftly down to the railway station before they knew their mistake. As they started to turn back and try again, a great shell fell into the little artificial lake just beyond them. It roared under the surface, and then shot up a fountain of water twenty feet high, with edges of white foam.

"It is time to go," said Hilda; "they will send another shell. They always do. They are going to bombard the town."

They spurted back to the square, and

as they circled it, still puzzled for the way of escape, two shells went sailing high over them and fell into the town beyond.

"Jack Johnsons," said Woffington. This time, he made the right turn, back of the Cloth Hall into the safe country.

Never had it felt so good to Hilda to leave a place.

"I am afraid," she said to herself. Now she knew why brave men sometimes ran like rabbits.

"Go back to London, and report what we have seen," urged Dr. McDonnell. "We can set England aflame with it. The English people will rise to it, if they know their wounded are being neglected."

"It takes a lot to rouse the English," said Hilda; "that is their greatest quality, their steadiness. In our country we'd have a crusade over the situation, and then we'd forget all about it. But

you people won't believe it for another year or so. When you do believe it, you'll cure it."

"You will see," replied the Doctor.

"I'll try," said Hilda.

It was one of those delightful mixed grills in Dover Street, London, where men and women are equally welcome. Dover Street is lined with them, pleasant refuges for the wives of army officers, literary women of distinction, and the host of well-to-do uncelebrated persons, who make the rich background of modern life. Dr. McDonnell's warm friend, the Earl of Tottenham, and his wife, were entertaining Hilda at dinner, and, knowing she had something to tell of conditions at Ypres, they had made Colonel Albert Bevan one of the party.

Hilda thought Colonel Bevan one of the cleverest men she had ever met. He had a quick nervous habit of speech, a clean-shaven alert face, with a smile that

threw her off guard and opened the way for the Colonel to make his will prevail. He was enjoying a brilliant Parliamentary career. He had early thrown his lot with the Liberals, and had never found cause to regret it. He had been an under-secretary, and, when the war broke out, Kitchener had chosen him for his private emissary to the fighting line to report back to the Chief the exact situation. He was under no one else than K.; came directly to him with his findings, went from him to the front.

"My dear young lady," the Colonel was saying, "you've forgotten that Ypres was the biggest fight of the war, one of the severest in all history. In a day or two, we got things in hand. You came down on a day when the result was just balanced. It was a toss-up whether the other fellows would come through or not. You see, you took us at a bad time."

"How about the ambulances that

weren't working?" asked Hilda. "The square was lined with them."

"I know," responded the Colonel, "but the city was likely to be evacuated at any hour. As a matter of fact, those ambulances were used all night long after the bombardment began, emptying the three military hospitals, and taking the men to the train. We sent them down to Calais. You were most fortunate in getting through the lines at all. I shouldn't have blamed Captain Fitzgerald if he had ordered you back to Furnes."

"Captain Fitzgerald!" exclaimed Hilda. "How did you know I was talking with him?"

"I was there that day in Ypres," said the Colonel.

"You were in Ypres," repeated Hilda, in astonishment.

"I was there," he said; "I saw the whole thing. You came down upon our lines as if you had fallen out of a blue

moon. What were we to do? A very charming young American lady, with a very good motor ambulance. It was a visitation, wasn't it? If we allowed it regularly, what would become of the fighting? Why, there are fifty volunteer organizations, with cars and nurses, cooling their heels in Boulogne. If we let one in, we should have to let them all come. There wouldn't be any room for troops."

"But how about the wounded?" queried Hilda. "Where do they come in?"

"In many cases, it doesn't hurt them to lie out in the open air," responded the Colonel; "that was proved in the South African War. The wounds often heal if you leave them alone in the open air. But you people come along and stir up and joggle them. In army slang, we call you the body snatchers."

"What you say about the wounded is absurd," replied Hilda.

"Tut, tut," chided the Colonel.

"I mean just that," returned the girl, with heat. "It is terrible to leave men lying out who have got wounded. It is all rot to say the open air does them good. If the wound was clean from a bullet, and the air pure, and the soil fresh as in a new country, that would be true in some of the cases. The wound would heal itself. But a lot of the wounds are from jagged bits of shell, driving pieces of clothing and mud from the trenches into the flesh. The air is septic, full of disease from the dead men. They lie so close to the surface that a shell, anywhere near, brings them up. Three quarters of your casualties are from disease. The wound doesn't heal; it gets gangrene and tetanus from the stale old soil. And instead of having a good fighting man back in trim in a fortnight, you have a sick man in a London hospital for a couple of months, and a cripple for a lifetime."

"You would make a good special

pleader," responded the Colonel with a bow. "I applaud your spirit, but the wounded are not so important, you know. There are other considerations that come ahead of the wounded."

"But don't the wounded come first?" asked Hilda, in a hurt tone.

"Certainly not," answered the Colonel. "We have to keep the roads clear for military necessity. This is the order in which we have to regard the use of roads in war-time." He checked off his list on his fingers —

"First comes ammunition, then food, then reinforcements, and fourth, the wounded."

IN RAMSKAPPELE BARNYARD

Thirteen dead men were scattered about in the straw and dung. Some of them were sitting in absurd postures, as if they were actors in a pantomime. Others of them, though burned and shattered, lay peacefully at full length. No impress of torture could any longer rob them of the rest on which they had entered so suddenly. I saw that each one of them had come to the end of his quest and had found the thing for which he had been searching. The Frenchman had his equality now. The German had doubtless by this time, found his God "a mighty fortress." The Belgian had won a neutrality which nothing would ever invade.

As I looked on that barnyard of dead, I was glad for them that they were dead, and not as the men I had seen in the hospital wards — the German with his leg being

sawn off, and the strange bloated face of the Belgian: all those maimed and broken men condemned to live and carry on the living flesh the pranks of shell fire. For it was surely better to be torn to pieces and to die than to be sent forth a jest.

VI

THE CHEVALIER

HILDA'S friends in England had prepared a "surprise" for her. It was engineered by a wise and energetic old lady in London, who had been charmed with the daring of the American girl at the front. So, without Hilda's knowledge, she published the following advertisement: —

> "'HILDA' — Will every Hilda, big and little, in Great Britain and Ireland, send contributions for a 'Hilda' motor ambulance, costing £500, to be sent for service in Pervyse, to save wounded Belgian soldiers from suffering? It will be run by a nurse named Hilda. 'Lady Hildas' subscribe a guinea, 'Hildas' over sixteen, half-guinea, 'Little Hildas', and 'Hildas' in straightened circumstances, two-shillings-and-sixpence."

That was the "Personal" on the front page of the London *Times*, which had gone out over the land.

Hilda's life at the front had appealed to the imagination of some thousands of the Belgian soldiers, and to many officers. The fame of her and of her two companions had grown with each week of the wearing, perilous service, hard by the Belgian trenches. Gradually there had drifted out of the marsh-land hints and broken bits of the life-saving work of these Pervyse girls, all the way back to England. The Hildas of the realm had rallied, and funds flowed into the London office, till a swift commodious car was purchased, and shipped out to the young nurse.

And now Hilda's car had actually come to her, there at the dressing-station in Pervyse. The brand new motor ambulance was standing in the roadway, waiting her need. Its brown canopy was shiny in the sun. A huge Red Cross

adorned either side with a crimson splash that ought to be visible on a dark night. The thirty horse-power engine purred and obeyed with the sympathy of a high-strung horse. Seats and stretchers inside were clean and fresh for stricken men. From Hilda's own home town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, had come a friendship's garland of one hundred dollars. She liked to fancy that this particular sum of money had passed into the front wheels, where the speed was generated.

"My car, my very own," she murmured. She dreamed about it, and carried it in her thoughts by day. She had fine rushes of feeling about it, too. It must do worthy work, she said to herself. There could be no retreating from bad pockets with that car. There must be no leaving the wounded, when the firing cuts close, no joy-riding.

She could not help feeling proud of her position. There was no other woman

out of all America who had won through to the front. And on all the Western battle-line of four hundred miles, there were no other women, save her and her two friends, who were doing just this sort of dangerous touch-and-go work. With her own eyes she had read the letters of more than two hundred persons, begging permission to join the Corps. There were women of title, professional men of standing. What had she done to deserve such lucky eminence? Why was she chosen to serve at the furthest outpost where risk and opportunity went hand in hand?

Dr. Neil McDonnell, leader of the Ambulance Corps, had brought a party of her friends from Furnes, to celebrate the coming of the car. Dr. McDonnell was delighted with every success achieved by his "children." When the three women went to Pervyse, and the fame of them spread through the Belgian Army, the Doctor was as happy

as if a grandchild had won the Derby. He was glad when Mrs. Bracher and "Scotch" received the purple ribbon and the starry silver medal for faithful service in a parlous place. He was now very happy that Hilda's fame had sprung to England, taken root, and bloomed in so choice a way. He had a curiously sweet nature, the Doctor, a nature without animosities, absent-minded, filmed with dreams, and those dreams large, bold and kindly.

"Your car is better than a medal," he said; "a medal can't save life, but this car will. This is as good as an endowed hospital bed. It's like the King's touch; it heals everyone who comes near. May its shadow never grow less."

"I hope they won't shoot away its bonnet," said Hilda; "there's nothing so dead-looking as a wrecked ambulance. I saw one the other day on the Oestkirke road. It looked like a summer-resort place in winter."

"No danger," replied the Doctor, who was of a buoyant cast; "you are born lucky. You're one of the Fortunate Seven. You know there are Seven Fortunate born in each generation. All the good things come to them without striving. You are one of the Fortunate Seven."

"We shall see," responded Hilda.

The Doctor was just starting back to Furnes, when he remembered what he had come for.

"By the way," he called to Hilda, "what driver do you want?"

"Smith, of course," she answered. "Whom could I want but Smith? He is quite the bravest man I have met in the twenty weeks out here."

"He's only a chauffeur," remarked one of the Corps.

"Only a chauffeur," echoed Hilda; "only the man who runs the car and picks up the wounded, and straps in the stretchers. Give me Smith, every time —" she ended.

"He looks like a hero, doesn't he?" said the same member of the Corps.

"No, he doesn't," laughed Hilda, "and that's the joke."

Smith reported for duty early next morning.

"We must christen the car in some real way," she said. "How shall it be, Smith?"

"Dixmude," he answered. He generally dealt in replies of one word. He was a city lad, slight in frame, of pale, tired face.

"Yes, there is always work at Dixmude," Hilda agreed.

They started on the six-mile run.

"What do you think of using black troops against white, miss?" asked Smith, after they had bowled along for a few minutes.

"I'm not a warlike person," replied Hilda, "so I don't know what's the proper thing. But, just the same, I don't like to see them using black men.

They don't know what they're fighting about. Anyway, I'd rather help them, than shoot them."

"It isn't their fault, is it, miss?" said Smith.

"By no means," returned Hilda; "they deserve all the more help because they are ignorant."

"That's right enough, too," agreed Smith and relapsed into his constitutional silence. He had a quiet way with him, which was particularly agreeable when the outer air was tense.

They rode on into Dixmude. The little city had been torn into shreds, as a sail is torn by a hurricane. But the ruined place was still treated from time to time with shell fire, lest any troops should make the charred wreckage a cover for advancing toward the enemy trenches. They rode on to where they caught a flash of soldiers' uniform.

In a blackened butt of an inn, a group of Senegalese were hiding. They were

great six-foot fellows, with straight bodies, and shoulders for carrying weights — the face a black mask, expressionless, save for the rolling whites of the eyes, and the sudden startling grin of perfect white teeth, when trouble fell out of the sky. They had been left there to hold the furthest outpost. A dozen of them were hale and cheery. Two of them sat patiently in the straw, nursing each a damaged arm. Out in the gutter, fifty feet away, one sat picking at his left leg. Smith turned the car, half around, then backed it toward the ditch, then forward again, and so around, till at last he had it headed back along the road they had come. Then he brought it to a standstill, leaving the power on, so that the frame of the car shook, as the body of a hunting dog shakes before it is let loose from the leash.

There was a wail in the air overhead, a wail and then a roar, as a shell cut close over the hood of the ambu-

lance and exploded in the low wall of the house opposite. Three more came more quickly than one could count aloud.

"Four; a battery of four," said Hilda.

The enemy artillery had sighted their ambulance, and believing it to contain reinforcements or ammunition, were leveling their destruction at it. The high car with its brown canvas covering was a fair mark in the clear morning light. Hilda motioned the two wounded men in the inn to come to the car. They slowly rose to their feet, and patiently trudged out into the road. Smith gave them a hand, and they climbed upon the footboard of the ambulance, and over into the interior. One of the black men called harshly to the man in the ditch down the road. He turned from his sitting posture, fell over on his face, and then came crawling on his hands and knees.

"Why doesn't he walk?" asked Hilda.

"Foot shot away," replied Smith.

She saw the raw, red flesh of the lower leg, as if the work of his maker had been left incompleted. Again in the air there was the moan of travelling metal, then the heavy thud of its impact, the roar as it released its explosive, and the shower of brick dust, iron and pebbles. Again, the following three, sharp and close, one on the track of the other.

"They've got our range all right," said Smith.

The black man, trailing his left leg, seemed slow in coming, as he scratched along over the ground. This is surely death, Hilda said to herself, and she felt it would be good to die just so. She had not been a very sinful person, but she well knew there had been much in her way of doing things to be sorry for. She had spoken harshly, and acted cruelly. She had brought suffering to other lives with her charm. And, suddenly in this flash of clear seeing, she

knew that by this single act of standing there, waiting, she had wiped out the wrong-doing, and found forgiveness. She knew she could face the dark as blithely as if she were going to her bridal. Strange how the images of an old-fashioned and outgrown religion came back upon her in this instant. Strange that she should feel this act was bringing her an atonement and that she could meet death without a tremor. The gods beyond this gloom were going to be good to her, she knew it. They would salute Smith and herself, as comrades unafraid.

She was glad, too, that her last sight of things would be the look at the homely face of Smith, as he stood there at his full height, which was always a little bent, very much untroubled by the passing menace. She did not know that there was anyone with whom she would rather go down than with the ignorant boy, who was holding his life

cheap for a crippled black man. Somehow, being with him in this hour, connected her with the past of her own life, for, after her fashion, she had tried to be true to her idea of equality. She had always felt that such as he were worthy of the highest things in life. And there he stood, proving it. That there was nobody beside herself to see him, struck her as just a part of the general injustice. If he had been a great captain, doing this thing, he would go down a memory to many. Being an unknown lad of the lower class, he would be as little recognized in his death as in life. It was strange what racing and comprehensive work her brain compassed in a little moment. It painted by flashes and crowded its canvas with the figures of a life-time. Only those who have not lived such a moment, doubt this.

Then came two more shells, this time just in front of the car and low. And now the negro, creeping along, had

reached the car. Smith and Hilda lifted him in, and waved good-bye to the black men flattened against the wall of the inn. Smith put on power, and they raced to the turn of the road.

There at the cross-roads, on horseback, was Hilda's faithful and gallant friend, Commandant Jost, friend of the King's. He was using his field-glasses on the road down which they had sped.

"*C'est chaud,*" called Hilda to her old friend, "it was lively."

"Yes," he answered soberly. "I just came up in time to see you. I didn't know it was you. I have been watching your car with my glasses. They nearly hit you. I counted ten reports into the street where you were."

"Yes," returned Hilda, "but all's well that ends well."

"How many men did you rescue?" asked the Commandant.

"Three," answered the girl; "the last fellow came slowly. His foot was bad."

The Commandant dismounted and came round to the back of the car. He threw up the hood.

"You did this for black men?" he said slowly.

"Why not?" asked Hilda in surprise. "If they're good enough to fight for us, they're good enough to save."

"The King shall know of this," he said; "it means a decoration. I will see to it."

Hilda's face lighted up for an instant. Then the glow died down; she became grave.

"If anything comes of this," she said simply, "it goes to Smith. I must insist on that."

"There is just one thing about it," replied the Commandant. "We cannot give our decorations around wholesale. The King wishes to keep them choice by keeping them rare. Now it really will not do to add two more decorations to your little group. Two of your

women have already received them. This was a brave piece of work — one of the bravest I ever saw. It deserves a ribbon. It shall have a ribbon, if I can reach the King. But two ribbons, no. It cannot be."

"Ah, you don't need to tell me that," returned Hilda. "I know that. One decoration is quite enough. But that decoration, if granted, must go to Smith."

The highest honor in the gift of the King of the Belgians was being conferred: a Red Cross worker was about to be made Chevalier of the Order of Leopold. Doubtless one would rather be decorated by Albert than by any other person in the world. It was plain already that he was going down into history as one of the fabulous good rulers, with Alfred and Saint Louis, who had been as noble in their secret heart as in their pride of place. It was fitting

that the brief ceremony should be held in Albert's wrecked village of Pervyse, with shell pits in the road, and black stumps of ruin for every glance of the eye. For he was no King of prosperity, fat with the pomp of power. He was a man of sorrows, the brother of his crucified people.

But the man who was about to be honored kept getting lost. The distinguished statesmen, officers, and visiting English, formed their group and chatted. But the object of their coming together was seldom in sight. He disappeared indoors to feed the wasted cat that had lived through three bombardments and sought her meat in wrecked homes. He was blotted out by the "Hilda" car, as he tinkered with its intimacies. No man ever looked less like a Chevalier, than Smith, when discovered and conducted to the King. Any of the little naval boy officers standing around with their gold braid on the

purple cloth, looked gaudier than Smith. He looked more like a background, with his weather-worn khaki, and narrow, high-hitched shoulders, than like the center-piece in a public performance.

There came a brief and painful moment, when the King's favor was pinned upon him.

"The show is over, isn't it?" he asked.

Hilda smiled.

"I suppose you'll go and bury the medal in an old trunk in the attic," she said.

Smith walked across to the car, and opened the bonnet. The group of distinguished people had lost interest in him. Hilda followed him over.

"You're most as proud of that car as I am," she said; "it's sort of your car, too, isn't it?"

Smith was burrowing into the interior of things, and had already succeeded in smearing his fingers with grease within three minutes of becoming a Chevalier.

"Fact is, ma'am," he answered, "it is my car, in a way. You see, my mother's name is Hilda, same as yours. My mother, she gave half-a-crown for it."

WITH THE AMBULANCE

We were carrying a dead man among the living.

"Take him out and leave him," ordered our officer; "it is bad for the wounded men riding next to him and under him."

We lifted him down from his swinging perch in the car. He was heavy at the shoulders to shift. The dead seem heavier than the quick. We stretched him at full length in the sticky mud of the gutter at the side of the road. He lay there, white face and wide eyes in the night, as if frozen in his pain. Soldiers, stumbling to their supper, brushed against his stiff body and then swerved when they saw the thing which they had touched. A group of doctors and officers moved away. Mud from the sloughing tires of the transports spattered him, but not enough to cover him. No one had time to give him his resting-place. We were too busy with

the fresher shambles, and their incompleted products, to pause for a piece of work so finished as that cold corpse.

But no indignity of the roadway can long withold him from his portion of peace, and the land that awakened his courage will receive him at last. There is more companionship under the ground than above it for one who has been gallant against odds.

VII

THE AMERICAN

ATROCITIES, rubbish!" said the man. "A few drunken soldiers, yes. Every war has had them. But that's nothing. They're all a bunch of crazy children, both sides, and pretty soon they'll quiet down. In the meantime," he added with a smile, "we take the profits — some of us, that is."

"Is that all the war means to you?" asked Hilda.

"Yes, and to any sensible person," replied he. "Why do you want to go and get yourself mixed up in it? An American belongs out of it. Go and work in a settlement at home and let the foreign countries stew in their own juice."

"Belgium doesn't seem like a foreign country to me," returned the girl. "You

see, I know the people. I know young Lieutenant Robert de Broqueville and Commandant Gilson, with the wound on his face, and the boys that come into the Flandria Hospital with their fingers shot away. They are like members of my family. They did something for me."

"How do you make that out?"

The girl was silent for a moment, then she answered:

"They stood up for what was a matter of honor. They made a fight against odds. They could have sold out easy enough."

"Well, I don't know," said the man, stretching his arms and yawning.

"No, that's just the trouble with men like you. You don't know, and you don't care to know. You're all alike; you stand aloof or amused. A great human wrong has taken place, and you say, 'Well, I don't know!'"

"Just a moment," interrupted the man.

"But I haven't finished," went on the girl; "there's another thing I want to say. When Belgium made her fight, she suffered horrible things. Her women and children were mutilated on system, as part of a cold policy. Cruelty to the unoffending, that is what I mean by atrocities."

"I don't believe you," retorted the man.

"Come and see."

Hilda, who had run across from Ghent to London to stock up on supplies for the Corps, was talking with John Hinchcliffe, American banker, broker, financier. He was an old-time friend of Hilda's family — a young widower, in that successful period of early middle-age when the hard work and the dirty work have availed and the momentum of the career maintains itself. In the prematurely gray hair, the good-looking face, the abrupt speech, he was very much American. He was neat — neat

in his way of dressing, and in his compact phrases, as hard and well-rounded as a pebble. The world to him was a place full of slackers, of lazy good-nature, of inefficiency. Into that softness he had come with a high explosive and an aim. He moved through life as a hunter among a covey of tame partridges — a brief flutter and a tumble of soft flesh. He had the cunning lines about the mouth, the glint in the eye, of the successful man. He had the easy generosities, too, of the man who, possessing much, can express power by endowing helpless things which he happens to like. There was an abundant sentiment in him, sentiment about his daughter and his flag, and the economic glory of his times. He was rather proud of that soft spot in his make-up. When men spoke of him as hard, he smiled to himself, for there in his consciousness was that streak of emotional richness. If he were attacked for raiding a trolley sys-

tem, he felt that his intimates would declare, "You don't know him. Why John is a King."

And, best of all, he had a kind of dim vision of how his little daughter would come forward at the Day of Judgment, if there was anything of the sort, and say, "He was the best father in the world."

Hilda and the banker sat quietly, each busy in thought with what had been said. Then the girl returned to her plea.

"Come now, Mr. Hinchcliffe," she said, "you've challenged every statement I've made, and yet you've never once been on the ground. I am living there, working each day, where things are happening. Now, why don't you come and see for yourself? It would do you a lot of good."

"I'm over here on business," objected the banker.

"Perfect reply of a true American," retorted Hilda, hotly. "Here are three

or four nations fighting for your future, saving values for your own sons and grandsons. And you're too busy to inform yourself as to the rights of it. You prefer to sit on the fence and pluck the profits. You would just as lief sell to the Germans as to the Allies, if the money lay that way and no risk."

"Sure. I did, in September," said the banker, with a grin; "shipped 'em in by way of Holland."

"Yes," said Hilda, angrily, "and it was dirty money you made."

"What would you have us do?" asked he. "We're not in business for our health."

"I tell you what I'd have you do," returned Hilda. "I'd have you find out which side was in the right in the biggest struggle of the ages. If necessary, I'd have you take as much time to informing yourself as you'd give to learning about a railroad stock which you were going to buy. Here's the biggest thing

that ever was, right in front of you, and you don't even know which side is right. You can't spare three days to find out whether a nation of people is being done to death."

"What next?" asked the banker with a smile. "When I have informed myself, what then? Go and sell all that I have and give to the poor?"

"No, I don't ask you to come up to the level of the Belgians," answered Hilda, "or of the London street boys. But what can be asked even of a New York banker is that he shall sell to the side that is in the right. And when he does it, that he shall not make excessive profits."

"Run business by the Golden Rule?"

"No, not that, but just catch a little of the same spirit that is being shown by millions of the common people over there. Human nature isn't half as selfish and cowardly as men like you make out. You'll burn your fingers if you

try to put a tag on these peasants and shop-assistants and clerks, over here. They're not afraid to die. The modern man is all right, but you fellows at the top don't give him half a chance. A whole race of peasants can be burned out and mutilated, and it doesn't cause a flutter in the pulse-beat of one of you American traders."

"You're a damn poor American," said the banker bluntly.

"You're the poor American," replied Hilda. "An uncle of mine, with a few 'greats' in front of him, was one of the three to sign the Declaration of Independence for Connecticut. Another of us was in Lincoln's Cabinet. My people have helped to make our country. We were the ones that welcomed Louis Kossuth, and Garibaldi. We are Americans. It's men like you that have weakened the strain — you and your clever tricks and your unbelief. You believe in nothing but success. 'Money is

power,' say you. It is you that don't believe in America, not I."

"What does it all come to?" he broke in harshly. "What is it all about? You talk heatedly but what are you saying? I have given money to the Relief Work. I've done something, I've got results. Where would you have been without money?"

"Money!" said Hilda. "A thousandth part of your makings. And these people are giving their life! Why, once or twice a day, they are putting themselves between wounded men and shell fire. You talk about results. There are more results in pulling one Belgian out of the bloody dust than in your lifetime of shaving the market."

The color came into his face with a rush. He was so used to expressing power, sitting silent and a little grim, and moving weaker men to his will, that it was a new experience to be talked to by a person who quite visibly had vital force.

"I used to be afraid of people like you," she went on. "But you don't look half as big to me now as one of these young chauffeurs who take in the wounded under shrapnel. You've come to regard your directive ability as something sacred. You think you can sit in moral judgment on these people over here — these boys that are flinging away their lives for the future. Come with me to Belgium, and find out what they're really fighting about."

Hinchcliffe was used to swift decisions.

"I'll do it," he said.

Hilda took him straight to Ghent. Then she pushed her inquiries out among her Belgian friends. The day before, there had been a savage fight at Alost.

"You will find what you want in Wetteren Hospital," suggested Monsieur Caron, Secretary of the Ghent Red Cross, to Hilda.

"To-morrow, we will go there," she said.

That first evening, she led Hinchcliffe through Ghent. In her weeks of work there, she had come to love the beautiful old town. It was strangely unlike her home cities — the brisk prairie "parlor city," where she had grown up inch by inch, as it extended itself acre by acre, and the mad modern city where she had struggled for her bread. The tide of slaughter was still to the east: a low rumble, like surf on a far-away beach. Sometimes it came whinnying and licking at the very doorstep, and then ebbed back, but never rolled up on the ancient city. It was only an under-hum to merriment. It sharpened the nerve of response to whatever passing excellence there was in the old streets and vivid gardens. Modern cities are portions of a world in the making. But Ghent was a completed and placid thing, as fair as men could fashion it.

As evening fell, they two leaned on St. Michel's bridge of the River Lys. Just under the loiterers, canals that wound their way from inland cities to the sea were dark and noiseless, as if sleep held them. The blunt-nosed boats of wide girth that trafficked down those calm reaches were as motionless as the waters that floated them. Out of the upper air, bells from high towers dropped their carillon on a population making its peace with the ended day. Cathedral and churches and belfry were massed against the night, cutting it with their pinnacles till they entered the region of the early stars and the climbing moon.

Then, when that trance of peace had given them the light sadness which fulfilled beauty brings, they found it good to hasten down the deserted street to the cafés and thronging friendly people. They knew how to live and take their pleasure, those people of Ghent. No sullen silence and hasty gorging for them.

They practised a leisurely dining and an eager talk, a zest in the flying moment. Their streets were blocked to the curb with little round occupied tables. Inner rooms were bright with lights and friendly with voices. From the silver strainer of the "filtered coffee" the hot drops fell through to the glass, one by one, black and potent. Good coffee, and a gay race.

But those lively people knew in their hearts that a doom was on its way, so their evenings had the merit of a vanishing pleasure, a benefit not to be renewed with the seasons. Time for the people of Ghent carried the grace of last days, when everything that is pleasant and care-free is almost over, and every greeting of a comrade is touched with Vale. It is the little things that are to be lost, so to the little things the time remaining is given. It is then one learns that little things are the dearest, the light-hearted supper in the pleasant café with the

friend whose talk satisfies, the walk down street past familiar windows, the look of roofs and steeples dim in the evening light.

"It's different, isn't it?" said the banker thoughtfully.

"Yes," agreed Hilda; "it isn't much like Chicago."

"Think of destroying places like this!" went on Hinchcliffe. "Why, they can't rebuild them."

"No," laughed Hilda; "this sort of ancestral thing isn't quite in our line."

"How foolish of them to go to war!" continued the banker. When his mind once gripped an idea, it carried it through to the terminal station. Hilda turned on him vigorously.

"You realize, don't you," she said, "that Belgium didn't bring on this war? You remember that it was some one else that came pouncing down upon her. It seems almost a pity, doesn't it, to smash this beauty and hunt these nice people?"

"It's all wrong," he said; "it's all wrong."

Wetteren Hospital — brick walls and stone floors, the clatter of wooden shoes in the outer corridor, where peasants shuffled. In two inner rooms, where eleven cots stood, there was a hush, for there lay the grievously wounded. Eleven peasants they were, men, women, and a child. A priest was ministering cheer to them, bed by bed. Four Sisters were busy and noiseless in service. The priest led Hilda and Hinchcliffe to the cot of one of the men. The peasant's face was pallid, and the cheeks sunken from loss of blood. The priest addressed him in Flemish, telling him these two were friendly visitors, and wished to know what had been done to him. Quietly and sadly the man in the bed spoke. Sentence by sentence the priest translated it for Hilda and the banker. On Sunday morning, the peasant, Leopold

de Man, of Number 90 Hovenier Straat, Alost, was hiding in the house of his sister, in the cellar. The Germans made a fire of the table and chairs in the upper room. Then catching sight of Leopold, they struck him with the butt of their guns, and forced him to pass through the fire. Then, taking him outside, they struck him to the ground, and gave him a blow over the head with a gun stock, and a cut of the bayonet which pierced his thigh, all the way through.

Slowly, carefully, he went on with his statement:

"In spite of my wound they make me pass between their lines, giving me still more blows of the gun-butt in the back, in order to make me march. There are seventeen or eighteen persons with me. They place us in front of their lines and menace us with their revolvers, crying out that they will make us pay for the losses they have suffered at Alost. So, we march in front of the troops.

"When the battle begins, we throw ourselves on our faces to the ground, but they force us to rise again. At a certain moment, when the Germans are obliged to retire, we succeed in escaping down side streets."

Hilda was watching Hinchcliffe while the peasant and the priest were speaking. Curiously and sympathetically she watched him. A change had come over the man: something arrogant had left him. Even his voice had changed, as he leaned forward and asked, "What does he say?" The banker had pulled out a black leather note-book, and was taking down the translation as the priest gave it. Something kindly welled up inside Hilda toward him. Something spoke to her heart that it was the crust of him that had fallen away. She had misjudged him. In her swift way she had been unjust. Her countryman was not hard, only unseeing. Things hadn't been brought to his attention. She was humbly glad that she

had cared to show him where the right of things lay. Her fault was greater than his. He had only been blind. Distance had hidden the truth from him. But she had been severe with him to his face. She had committed the sin of pride, the sin of feeling a spiritual superiority.

"If you please, come to the other side of the room," said the priest, leading the way to the cot of a peasant, whose cheeks had the angry red spot of fever. He was Frans Meulebroeck, of Number 62 Drie Sleutelstraat, Alost. Sometimes in loud bursts of terror and suffering, and then falling back into a hopeless pain-laden monotone, he told his story.

"They broke open the door of my home," he said; "they seized me, and knocked me down. In front of my door, the corpse of a German lay stretched out. The Germans said to me, 'You are going to pay for that to us.' A few moments later, they gave me a bayonet

cut in my leg. They sprinkled naphtha in my house, and set it afire. My son was struck down in the street, and I was marched in front of the German troops. I do not know even yet the fate of my son."

Gradually as the peasant talked, the time of his suffering came upon him. His eyes began to see it again in front of him. They became fixed and wild, the white of them visible. His voice was shrill and broken with sobs. There was a helpless unresisting agony in his tone and the look on his face.

"My boy!" he said. "I haven't seen him." His body shook with sobbing.

"Enough," said the priest. "*Bonne chance,* comrade; courage."

In the presence of the priest and of the Sister, the two peasants signed each man his statement, Leopold firmly, the fevered Frans making his mark with a trembling hand. Hinchcliffe shut his notebook and put it back into his pocket.

The little group passed into the next room, where the wounded women were gathered. A Sister led Hilda to the bedside of a very old woman, perhaps eighty years old. The eyes were closed, the thin white hair straggled across the pillow. There was no motion to the worn-out body, except for faint breathing.

"Cut through the thigh with a bayonet," said the Sister.

Hilda stepped away on tiptoe, and looked across the ward. There, rising out of the bedclothes, was a little head, a child's head, crowned with the lightest of hair. Gay and vivid it gleamed in that room of pain. It was hair of the very color of Hilda's own. The child was propped up in bed, and half bent over, as if she had been broken at the breastbone. It was the attitude of a bent old body, weary with age. And yet, the tiny oval face of soft coloring, and the bright hair, seemed made for happiness.

Clear across the room, otherwise so

silent in its patient misery, there came a little whistling from the body of the child. With each give of the breath, the sound was forced out. The wheezing, as if the falling breath caught on some jagged bit of bone, and struggled for a moment to tear itself free, hurt Hilda.

The face of the little girl was heavy with stupor, the eyes half closed. Pain had done its utmost, and a partial unconsciousness was spreading over troubled mind and tortured body. The final release was close at hand.

Hinchcliffe had stepped up. There was an intent look in his face as he watched the child. Then the man's expression softened. The cunning lines about the mouth took on something of tenderness. The shrewd, appraising eyes lost their glint under a film of tears. He went over to the little one, and touched her very lightly on the hair. It was bright and gay, and incongruous on a body that was so visibly dying.

It gave a pleasure of sunlight on what was doomed. Still she went on whistling through her broken body, and with each breath she gave a low murmur of pain.

"Sister," said Hilda, to one of the women, "what is it with the child? She is very ill?"

"She is dying," said the nurse. "Her back is slashed open to the bone with bayonets. She was placed in front of the troops, and they cut her, when she fell in fright."

"And her breathing?" asked Hilda. "I can hear her with each breath."

"Yes, it is hard with her. Her body is torn, and the breath is loud as it comes. It will soon be over. She will not suffer long."

Hilda and her companion stepped out into the open air, and climbed into the waiting motor. The banker was crying and swearing softly to himself.

"The little children who have died,

what becomes of them?" said Hilda. "Will they have a chance to play somewhere? And the children still in pain, here and everywhere in Belgium — will it be made up to them? Will a million of indemnity give them back their playtime? That little girl whom you touched —"

"The hair," he said, "did you see her hair? The same color as yours."

"I know," said Hilda, "I saw myself in her place. I feel that I could go out and kill."

"It was the hair," repeated the banker. "My little daughter's hair is the color of yours. That was why I let you say those things to me that evening in London. I could not sleep that night for thinking of all you said. And when I looked across the room just now, I thought it was my daughter lying there. For a moment, I thought I saw my daughter."

THE BONFIRE

We were prisoners, together — twenty-seven peasants and three of us that had been too curious of the enemy's camp. We were huddled in the dirt of a field, with four sentries over us, and three thousand soldiers round about us. Just across the country road, twenty-six little yellow-brick houses were blazing, the homes of the peasants of Melle. Each house was a separate torch, for they had been carefully primed with oil. The light of them, and almost the heat, was on our faces. It was a clear, warm evening. The fires of the cottages burned high. A full moon rose blood-red on the horizon, climbed to the dome and went across the sky to the south-west. Two dogs, chained in the yard of a burning house, howled all night. The peasant lying next us watched his home burn to pieces. It was straight across

from us. A soldier came to tell him that his wife was wounded but not dead. He lay through the night, motionless, and not once did he turn his eyes away from the blaze of his home. Petrol burns slowly and thoroughly.

In the early morning, soldiers with stretchers came marching down the road. They turned in at the smouldering cottages. From the ruins of the little house which the peasant had watched so intently, three bodies were carried. He broke into a long, slow sobbing.

VIII

THE WAR BABY

"A BABY?" cried Hilda in amazement.

"A baby, my dear," repeated Mrs. Bracher with emphasis. "Come, hurry up! We're wanted *tout de suite*."

The women had been sitting quite peacefully after supper. A jerk at the bell cord, a tiny tinkle, and Mrs. Bracher had answered the door. A big breathless civilian stood there. He said—

"Please, the Madame Doctor, quick. The baby is coming."

These astonishing peasants! Hilda could never get over her wonder at their stolidity, their endless patience, their matter-of-fact way of carrying on life under a cataclysm. They went on with their spading in the fields, while shrapnel was pinging. They trotted up

and down a road that was pock-marked with shell-holes. They hung out their washings where machine-gun bullets could aerate them. The fierce, early weeks of shattering bombardment had sent the villagers scurrying for shelter to places farther to the west. And for a time, Pervyse had been occupied only by soldiers and the three nurses. But soon the civilians came trickling back. They were tired of strange quarters, and homesick for their own. There were now more than two hundred peasants in Pervyse — men, women and children. The children, regardless of shell fire, scoured the fields for shrapnel bullets and bits of shells. They brought their findings to the nurses, and received pieces of chocolate in return. There was a family of five children, in steps, who wore bright red hoods. They liked to come and be nursed. The women had from six to a dozen peasants a day, tinkling the bell for treatment. Some

came out of curiosity. To these was fed castor-oil. One dose cured them. They came with every sort of ailment. A storekeeper, who kept on selling rock candy, had a heel that was "bad" from shrapnel. One mite of a boy had his right hand burned, and the wound continued to suppurate. He dabbled in ditch-water, and always returned to Hilda with the bandage very wet and dirty.

Here was their home — Belgium, flowering and happy, or Belgium, black and perishing. Still it is Belgium, the homeland. Why take on the ugly hazards of exile?

If your husband is ill and broken, you stay by him. He is your man. So with the land of your birth, the village where you are one with the soil. You stay and suffer, and meantime you live. Still you plant and plough, though the guns are loud in the night, and Les Bosches just over the meadow. And here was one of these women in the

wrecked, charred village of Pervyse carrying on the great, natural process of life as unperturbed as if her home was in a valley of peace.

The three women ran over to a little house two hundred yards down the road. One wall of it was bullet-chipped, one room of it a wreck from a spent obus. But, for the rest, it was a livable little place, and here was gathered a Flemish family. The event was half over, as Mrs. Bracher, closely followed by Scotch and Hilda, rushed in. The mother, fully dressed, was lying on a wooden bed that fitted into an alcove. She was typically Flemish, of high cheek-bones and very red cheeks. The entire family was grouped about the bed — a boy of twelve years, a girl of nineteen, and a girl of three. Attending the case, was a little old woman, the grandmother, wearing a knitted knobby bonnet, sitting high on the top of her head and tied under her chin — a conical frame for her pert, dark

eyes and firm mouth. She was a tiny woman, every detail of her in miniature, clearly defined, except the heavy, noisy wooden shoes. She carried in her personality an air of important indignation. With the confidence of a lifetime of obstetrical experience, she drew from her pocket a brown string, coarse and dirty, and tied up the newcomer's navel. It was little the nurses were allowed to help. Though a trained and certificated midwife, Mrs. Bracher was edged out of the ministration by the small, determined grandmother, who looked anger and scorn out of her little black eyes upon the three. She resented their coming. Antiseptic gauze and hot-water bottles were as alien as the Germans to her.

So "Pervyse" entered this world. Nothing could hold him back, neither shell nor bayonets. He had slipped through the net of death which men were so busily weaving. There he was, a matter of fact — a vital, lusty, shapeless fact.

To that little creature was given the future, and he was stronger than the artillery. By all the laws, vibrations of fear ought to have passed into the tiny body. His consciousness, it would seem, must be a nest of horrors. Instead of that, his cry had the insistence of health. His solemnity was as abysmal as that of a child of peace.

When the girls visited "Pervyse" next morning, the grandmother was nursing him with sugar and water from a quart bottle. She had him dressed in dark blue calico. Thereafter twice a day they called upon him, and each time Hilda carried snowy linen, hoping to win the grandmother. But the old lady was firm, and "Pervyse" was to thrive, looking all the redder, inside blue calico. The mother was a good mother, sweet and constant. Very slowly, the nurses won her confidence and the grandmother's respect.

"Do come away," urged Hilda. "Let me take you all back to La Panne, where

it is safer. Give 'Pervyse' his chance. It is senseless to live here in this shed under shell fire. Some day, the guns will get you, and then it will be too late."

But always they refused, mother, and brother, and big and little sister, and grandmother. The village was their place. The shed was their home.

Hilda brought her beautiful big ambulance to their door. There was room enough inside for them all to go together, with their bundles of household goods. And the mother smiled, saying:

"The shells will spare me. They will not hurt me."

"You refuse me to-day," replied Hilda, "but to-morrow I shall come again to take you away. I will take you to a new, safe home."

Very early the next morning, Hilda heard the sick crumble that meant the crunching of one more dwelling. She hurried to the door, and looked down

the road. The place of the new birth had tumbled, and a thick smoke was rising from the wreck. She ran faster than she had ever run for her own safety. She came to the little home in a ruin of plaster and glass and brick-dust. Destruction, long overdue, had fallen out of the sunny blue sky on the group of reckless survivors in that doomed village. The soldiers were searching in the smoking litter for bodies. Big sister and little sister and brother were dead, and the little old grandmother. The mother, with shell wounds at her nursing breasts, was dying. Only "Pervyse" was living and to live. By a miracle of selection, he lay in the wreck of his house and the grave of his people — one foot half off, but otherwise a survivor of the shell that had fallen and burst inside his home.

Swiftly Hilda in her car, carried mother and child to La Panne to the great military hospital. The mother died in

two hours on the operating table, and "Pervyse" was alone in a world at war.

The story and fame of him spread through the last city left to the Belgians. All the rest of their good land was trampled by the alien and marred by shell-fire and petrol. Here, alone in Flanders, there was still music in the streets, even if it was often a dead march. And here life was still normal and orderly. "Pervyse" found shelter in the military hospital where his mother had come only to die. He was the youngest wounded Belgian in all the wards. They put him in a private room with a famous English Colonel, and they called the two "Big Tom" and "Little Tom." The blue calico was changed for white things and "Pervyse" had a deep, soft cradle and more visitors than he cared to see.

The days of his danger and flight were evil days in Pervyse, for the guns grew

busier and more deadly. There came a last day for the famous little dressing-station of the women. It began with trouble at the trenches. Two boys of nineteen years were brought in to the nurses. One of them was carrying the brains of a dead comrade on his pocket. A shell had burst in their trench, giving them head wounds. They died in the hall. They had served two days at the front. The women placed them on stretchers in the kitchen, and covered their faces, and left them in peace. A brief peace, for a shell found the kitchen, and the blue fumes of it puffed into the room where the women were sitting. The orderly and four soldier friends came running in, holding their eyes. When Hilda entered the kitchen, she saw that the shell had hit just above those quiet bodies, bringing the rafters and glass and brick upon them. A beam, from the rafter, had been driven into the breast of one of the boys —

transfixing him as if by a lance. Shells were breaking in the road, the garden, the field and the near-by houses, every five seconds. In her own house, bricks were strewn about, and the windows smashed in. A large hole, in a shed back of the house, marked the flight of a shell, and behind it lay a dead man who had taken refuge there.

A Belgian had driven up their car a moment before and it was standing at the door. One soldier started to the car — a shell drove him back — a second dash and he made it, turned the car, and the women darted in. They sped down the road to the edge of the village, and here the nurses found shelter. Later that day the Colonel handed them a written order to evacuate Pervyse, lent them men to help, and gave them twenty minutes in which to pack and depart. They returned to their smashed house, and piled out their household goods. They left in the ambulance with all

the soldiers cheering them. They were a sad little lot. So the loyal four months of service were ended under a few hours of gun-fire, and Hilda and her friends had to follow "Pervyse" to his new home.

As she went down the road, she took one last look at the shattered place. No house in her earthly history had concentrated so many memories. There she had put off the care-free girl, and achieved her womanhood, as if at a stroke. There she and her friends had healed a thousand soldiers. They had welcomed the Queen, princes, generals, brave officers soon to die, famous artists under arms, laughing peasant soldiers, the great and the obscure, such a society gathered under the vast pressure of a world-war as had seldom graced the "At-Homes" of an Iowa girl. There she had won fame, and a dearer thing yet, honor, which needs not to be known in order to shed its lonely comfort. She

was leaving it all, forever, in that heap of plaster and crumbling brick.

She had rarely had him out of mind since that experience in Wetteren Convent, when they two had visited the little girl who lay dying of her bayonet wounds. But it was a full five months since she had seen him.

"I had to come back," said Hinchcliffe; "New York seemed out of it. I know there is work for me here — some little thing I can do to help you all.

"What luck?" he added.

"A shell has been following me around," replied Hilda. "So far, it has aways called too late, or missed me by a few feet of masonry. But it's on my trail. It took the windows out of my room at a doctor's house in Furnes. Later on, it went clean through my little room up over a tailor's shop. In Pervyse we had our Poste de Secours in the Burgomaster's house. One morning we

had stepped out for a little air — we were a couple of hundred yards down the road — when a big shell broke in the house. And now our last home in Pervyse is blown to pieces. Luck is good to me."

Hinchcliffe took his place, and a strong place it was, in the strange life of La Panne. A word from him smoothed out tangles. The État Major approved of him. He was twice arrested as a spy, and enjoyed the experience hugely. At one time, there was a deficiency of tires of the right make, and he put a rush order clear across the Atlantic and had the consignment over in record time. He cut through the red tape of the transport service, red tape that had been annoying even the established hospitals. He imported comforts for the helpers. There was a special brand of tea which the English nurses were missing. So there was nothing for it, but his London agent must accompany the lot in person

to La Panne. There was something restless, consuming, in his activity.

"Your maternity hospital is a great idea," said Hinchcliffe to Hilda, during one of their talks. "I've cabled for five thousand pounds. That will start things."

The maternity hospital had been suggested to Hilda by the plight of little "Pervyse," and the hundreds of other babies of the war whom she had seen, and the hapless peasant mothers. Military hospitals are for soldiers, not for expectant mothers or orphaned children, and "Pervyse's" days of glory were ending. Reluctantly Colonel Depage, head surgeon of the hospital, had told Hilda that "Pervyse" must seek another home. His room was needed for fighting men.

"Let me have him christened first?" asked Hilda, and the great Belgian physician had consented.

It took her a week to make ready the ritual, but the morning came at last.

"To-day we christen 'Pervyse,'" said Hilda to the banker. "Will you come?"

"It isn't just my sort of speciality," replied Hinchcliffe, "but of course I'll come, if you'll show me the moves."

Hilda had chosen for the ceremony a village church on the Dixmude road. They put all the little necessary bundles of baby life into Hilda's ambulance — a packet of little shawls, and intimate clothing, a basket of things to eat, a great christening cake, frosted by Dunkirk's leading confectioner, a can of chocolate and of cream, candy baskets of sweets. It was Sunday — a cloudless, innocent day. They dodged through Furnes, the ruined, and came at length to the village of their quest. They entered the convent, and found a neat, clean room of eight beds. Two babies had arrived. Six mothers were expectant. In charge of the room was a red-cheeked, black-eyed nurse, a Flemish girl, motherly with the babies. Hilda

dressed "Pervyse" in a long, white, immaculate dress, and a gossamer shawl, and pinned upon him a gold pin. She set the table in the convent — the cake in the center of the table, with one candle, and snowy blossoms from a plum tree.

Then the party started for the church: fifteen-year-old René, the Belgian boy scout who was to serve as godfather, giggling; the apple-cheeked Flemish girl carrying "Pervyse"; Hilda and Hinchcliffe closely following. They walked through the village street past laughing soldiers who called out, "*Les Anglais!*" They entered the church through the left door. A puff of damp air blew into their faces. In the chancel stood a stack of soldiers' bicycles. They kneeled and waited for the Curé. In the nave, old peasant women were nodding and dipping, and telling their beads. The nurse handed the baby to Hilda. René giggled. Three small children wandered near and

stared. On the right side of the church was heaped a bundle of straw, and three rosy soldiers emerged who had been sleeping there. They winked at the pretty Flemish nurse. The church for them was a resting-place, between trench service.

The old Curé entered with his young assistant. The youth was dudish, with a business suit, and a very high, straight collar that struck his chin. The Curé was in long, black robes, with skirts — a yellow man, gray-haired, his mouth a thin, straight slit, almost toothless. His eyebrows turned up, as if the face were being pulled. His heavy ears lay back against his head, large wads of cotton-wool in them. He talked with the nurse, inquiring for the baby's name. There were a half-dozen names for the mite — family names of father and mother, so that there might be a survival of lines once so numerous. René's name, too, was affixed. The Curé wrote

the names down on a slip of paper, and inserted it in his prayer-book. The service proceeded in Latin and Flemish.

Then "Pervyse" was carried, behind the bicycles, to a small room, with the font. Holy water was poured into a bowl. The old priest, muttering, put his thumb into the water, and then behind each ear of the baby, and at the nape of the neck. At the touch on the neck "Pervyse" howled. The priest's hand shook, so that he jabbed the wrong place, and repeated the stroke. Then the thumb was dipped again, and crossed on the forehead, then touched on the nose and eyes and chin. Between the dippings, the aged man read from his book, and the assistant responded. To Hinchcliffe, standing at a little distance, the group made a strange picture — "Pervyse" wriggling and sometimes weeping; Hilda "Shsh, Shysh, Shshing"; René nudging the Flemish girl, and giggling; the soldiers peeping from the

straw; the children, attracted by the outcries of "Pervyse," drawing closer; aged worshippers continuing their droning. "Pervyse" was held directly over the bowl and the slightly warmed water descended on him in volume. At this he shouted with anger. His head was dried and his white hood clapped on. He was borne to another room where from a cupboard the Curé took down the sacred pictures, and put them over the child's neck. René sat on the small stove in the corner of the room, and it caved in with a clatter of iron. But no side-issue could mar the ceremony which was now complete. "Pervyse" had a name and a religion.

Then it was back again to the convent for the cake, inviting the good old Curé to be one of the christening party. "Pervyse," his hand guided, cut the christening cake. The candle was lighted.

As the christening party sped homeward to La Panne, Hilda looked back.

High overhead on the tower of the church, two soldiers and two officers with field glasses were stationed, signalling to their field battery.

Without a mishap, they had returned to the military hospital, and "Pervyse," thoroughly awakened by the ceremony, had been restored to his white crib. To soften his mood, his bottle of supper had been handed to him a little ahead of time. But, unwilling to lay aside the prominence which had been his, all day, he brandished the bottle as if it were a weapon instead of a soporific.

"A pretty little service," said Hilda, "but there was something pathetic to it. The little kid looked so lonely in the damp old church. And no one there that really belonged to him. And to-morrow or the next day or some day, they'll get the range of this place, and then little "Pervyse" will join his mother and his brother and sisters. With us

older ones, it doesn't so much matter. We've had our bit of walk and talk and so good-by. But with a child it's different. All that love and pain for nothing. One more false start."

"By God, no!" said Hinchcliffe. "'Pervyse' shall have his chance, the best chance a kid ever had. I've got to get back to America. There'll be a smash if I don't. I'm a month late on the job, as it is. But 'Pervyse' goes with me. Little Belgium is going to get his chance."

"You mean—" said Hilda.

"Certainly, I do," replied the banker. "I mean that we're going to bring that kid up as good as if war was a dream. We're going to make him glad he's alive. He's going back to America with me. Will you come?"

"Why," said Hilda, her eyes filling, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that I need you. Show me how to put this thing, that we've been doing here, into New York. It's a dif-

ferent world after the war. You have often said it. America mustn't be behind. I want to catch up with these Red Cross chauffeurs. I want our crowd in Wall Street to be in on the fun. Come on and help."

"I don't know what to say," began Hilda. "I shall miss you so. The boys in the ward will miss you, the babies will miss you." She laughed. "I can't come just now. There is so much work, and worse ahead."

"Later, you will come?" he pleaded. He turned to the child who was wielding his bottle as a hammer on the foot of the bed, and lifted him shoulder high.

"Remember," he said, as the bottle was thumped on his head, "'Pervyse' and I will be waiting."

The bottle fell on the floor, and the outraged glass splintered, and "Pervyse's" supper went trickling down the cracks.

"You see," said the banker, "we are helpless without you."

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